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## INTERVIEW WITH INDIA

OTHER BOOKS BY MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE

*Eyes on Russia*

*Shooting the Russian War*

*Purple Heart Valley*

*Dear Fatherland, Rest Quietly*

WITH ERSKINE CALDWELL

*You Have Seen Their Faces*

*North of the Danube*

*Say, Is This the U.S.A.?*

# Interview with India

IN THE WORDS AND PICTURES OF

Margaret Bourke-White

THE TRAVEL BOOK CLUB

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FOR

*ROGER BOURKE-WHITE*

FATHER AND SON

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M. B.-W.

Darien, Conn.



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# INDIA AND PAKISTAN 1949



## PREFACE

HIGH on the snow-ribbed northern rim of the Indian peninsula is a tiny and antique principality charmingly named the State of Swat. Until my visit, the Swatis had never seen a woman photographer, and my interpreter informed me that they were thoroughly puzzled by my 'costume'—well-worn slacks and jacket literally dripping with camera trappings. 'It wears clothes like a man,' they reasoned, 'but it has hair like a woman.' The interpreter, a scholarly man and tutor to the young Prince of Swat, had settled the sex question, but he was unable to answer the next query: Was I a film actress or a circus performer?

Swati women live in seclusion and seldom venture away from home without veiling themselves in a garment built much like a balloon sail with eyeholes, a custom which dates from ancient times. But feudal Swat, like other remote portions of India, is starting to rub elbows with the twentieth century. Motor roads, schools, and telephones are appearing. The white-bearded Wali, grandson of a Muslim saint, rules his half-million subjects with the aid of a private phone system connecting with a chain of fortresses.

I was photographing this potentate one afternoon, in his air-conditioned palace, when the time came for his exercise. Since his daily stint is to climb a thousand-foot peak, I hoped to photograph him in the first few feet of the climb. To my dismay I found the lower part of the mountain in shadow; the sun was swiftly sinking behind the jagged peaks.

Far ahead of me the Wali leaped up the crags like a mountain goat, followed closely by his guards. I fell far to the rear, with a scattering of soldiers carrying my cameras. At eight hundred feet a prominent peak was still well lighted, and the Wali waited here for me to take his picture. Then he bounded off to complete his afternoon exercise, while I started down the crag at a more leisurely pace, carrying on a somewhat breathless conversation with the soldiers. Suddenly my interpreter hesitated. 'I can no longer interpret; they are talking about you.'

'Please,' I begged. 'Tell me what they are saying.'

'The soldiers are glad to see that an American woman can climb



the mountain. They say they are glad to know that American women are so able. Because then they know that American men must be still more able.'

This attitude—that only the man climbs the mountain—is changing rapidly in India and in Pakistan. The spirit and vitality of this change impressed me more than anything else. The sight of some women still wearing veils is of far less significance than the knowledge that many more women are breaking out of their ancient bondage, leaving seclusion to take an active part in the life of these new nations. Of course, I was distressed by feudal land-holding systems, the despotism of princes, and the vestiges of caste discrimination, but I was unexpectedly and even more deeply stirred by the heroic efforts being made to correct these inhumanities. To my Indian and Pakistan friends I may seem to have devoted too much space to some of these long-standing iniquities. But I feel that the Western reader needs this background to understand the scope and vitality of the progress being made.

My decision to go to India had been made nearly five years before I actually arrived. The Indian assignment was a matter of frequent discussion with my *Life* editors; but we felt that this country needed a thorough and interpretative coverage, and agreed that I would go only when I had the time to stay for a long period. During the war I criss-crossed about England, the Balkans, Russia, China, North Africa, Italy, and finally Germany in defeat. I was in the middle of a lecture tour when Wilson Hicks, *Life's* executive editor, who has an unfailing gift for sensing a coming story, telegraphed me that the time was at hand.

I arrived in India in the early spring of 1946. The groundwork for independence was being laid, and I stayed for most of that year, travelling about the country. Then I came home, started this book, found I wanted to learn more about India, and returned to spend part of '47 and '48 there.

Perhaps it was because I had come to India almost directly from the stagnation of Germany that the freshness, the quickening life of India struck me with such impact. Europe seemed heavy with the death of an era; India stood eager and shining with hope on the threshold of a new life. Tragic mistakes, false starts, unhappy compromises obviously wait for India in her immediate



## PREFACE

future, and the division into two separate nations is not the least of the difficulties. But to me India is not an old country; it is a very young one. And there is no doubt in my mind that India is to take an important place among nations.

I had heard so much about 'the inscrutable East' that the open-heartedness of Indians took me by surprise. I admired their eagerness to learn, and most of all I respected the quality they themselves call 'selflessness': the willingness to work, without hope of personal reward, for something they believe in. Most educated Indians speak excellent English, and I had no lack of willing and able interpreters. In every part of the country I found someone familiar with local dialects and customs ready to come to my aid.

The seething conflicts, the ferment and growth, the powers of medievalism clinging to ancient privilege while the people struggle upward to reach the light—this to me was the drama of India. When new nations rise from the debris of an outworn order and begin drawing up democratic laws, it marks an important step not only for them but for the whole forward march of the world. India and Pakistan are far from realizing complete 'freedom'; new constitutions do not automatically dissolve old iniquities, as we of the West will be the first to recognize, and as some events in this book will demonstrate.

M. B.-W.



## Chapter I

### BIRTH OF TWO NATIONS

WITH the coming of independence to India, the world had the chance to watch a most rare event in the history of nations: the birth of twins. It was a birth accompanied by strife and suffering, but I consider myself fortunate to have witnessed and been able to document the historic early days of these two nations: India and Pakistan.

When I went to the Punjab area, in the North of India, in the autumn of 1947 to begin photographing the new-born sovereign states, massive exchange of populations was under way. The roads connecting the Union of India with Pakistan looked as Oxford Street or the Charing Cross Road look during the rush hour. But instead of the two-way stream of motor-cars there were endless convoys of bullock carts, women on donkey back, men on foot carrying on their shoulders the very young or the very old.

Babies were born along the way. People died along the way. Some died of cholera, some from the attacks of hostile religious communities. But many of them simply dropped out of line from sheer weariness and sat by the roadside to wait patiently for death. Sometimes I saw children pulling at the arms and hands of a parent or grandparent, unable to comprehend that those arms would never be able to carry them again. The name 'Pakistan' means Land of the Pure: many of the pure never got there. The way to their Promised Land was lined with graves.

The hoofs of countless cattle raised such continuous columns of dust that a pillar of a cloud trailed the convoys by day. And in the evenings when the wayfarers camped by tens of thousands along the roadsides, and built their little fires and made their chapatties—a good deal, I suppose, like the unleavened bread of the Bible—the light of their camp fires rose into the dust-filled air until it seemed as if a pillar of fire hung over them at night.

Indeed, there was such a Biblical atmosphere about this mam-



moth two-way exodus that I turned to the Old Testament to compare its size with the migration of the Israelites. I found that the Children of Israel numbered eight hundred thousand, but since the Book of Exodus counted men only, this number would have to be tripled or quadrupled. Even so, the exodus of the Children of Israel was dwarfed by the great migration of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus which took place upon the partition of India. At the time that I was photographing it there were five million people on the move, with several more million due to follow as soon as room could be found for them. This, for these wretched millions, was the first bitter fruit of independence.

Only toward the end of the long fight for Indian freedom had the two-nation theory been conceived. The struggle toward independence had been for the most part a united effort by the people of all religions in India. In the final round partition was pressed and division lines hastily drawn on the map by persons with a tangle of aims. These purposes seldom bore much relation to the needs of the people whose lives were to be unexpectedly and radically changed. The problems of Hindu shopkeepers and factory workers were identical with those of Muslim shopkeepers and mill hands. The problems of Indians everywhere were to raise the standard of living, spread education, give land to the peasant, increase the yield from the soil, develop industry, improve health and medical facilities: in every way build for the richer and better life which citizens had believed the coming of freedom would mean for them. Partition only checked and postponed this progress, for it was an uneconomic and unreal division. Yet when the line was drawn, it was the people themselves who rushed to make this unreal division a reality.

They flowed in a two-way stream across the border. Into the Indian Union came the Hindus and Sikhs (differing slightly in their religious practice, the warlike Sikhs, famous for their picturesque beards and turbans, are an offshoot of the Hindu religion); the Muslims poured into their new Pakistan, which they looked on as their Promised Land. All were led by fear, by highly questionable leadership, by ever dwindling hope. What had been merely arbitrarily drawn areas on a map began emptying and refilling with human beings—neatly separated into so-called

'opposite' religious communities—as children's crayons fill in an outline map in geography class. But this was no child's play. This was a massive exercise in human misery.

As though the travail of a people divided by pen strokes was not great enough, North India, in this year of all years, suffered the worst floods since 1900. In the Punjab, which means Land of Five Rivers, all five began overflowing their banks, tearing away the earth barriers in the network of canals, spilling into the fields, and trapping entire encampments of refugees. I was almost caught myself in the rising of the River Ravi. I had found a vacant hut in a reedy area between the canal road and the river, and had spread my sleeping bag on the roof, where I looked forward to sleeping out in the moonlight. The soldiers accompanying me had built a beautiful fire, and had purchased food from a peasant village nearby. Supper was almost ready when a Punjabi officer, who was escorting a convoy along the highway and had seen my jeep turn into the canal road, hurried in to warn us to leave. We whirled off at once, only to find we had to wade waist-deep, pushing our jeep along the vanished ridge of roadway, between swirling pools deepening swiftly and treacherously beautiful in the moonlight.

Thousands of peasants less lucky than I were trapped—they had no jeep, no one to warn them. The River Beas claimed the most victims. When the water began receding sufficiently for me to get to it, I photographed one meadow between the river and a railway ramp where four thousand Muslims had gone in to camp for the night. Only one thousand had come out alive. That meadow was like a battlefield: carts overturned wildly, household goods and farm tools pressed into a mash of mud and wreckage. Several nights later I chanced on an encampment of the survivors of the Beas disaster just as they were settling down for the night. I talked with one man who was digging a grave by the side of the road. His name was Rasik; he came from Jullundur, where he and his brothers had owned a ten-acre orange grove. The grave was for his eight-year-old son, who had died just that afternoon. Rasik had been carrying the child's body until he had a chance to bury it properly and recite prayers over the grave, as any father would wish to do.

The convoy had pitched camp with much more cheer than



usual on the night of the disaster, Rasik told me, because the border of Pakistan was less than fifty miles away. At midnight he was awakened by the shouts of his neighbours. Rasik found the water was rising swiftly, and he and his family climbed to the top of their bullock cart. The water rose to the wheel-hubs, to their knees, to the top of the cart, to their chests. For two days and nights the family stayed on the cart, standing in water, without food, watching many of their friends being swept away, knowing that all their farm animals—so essential for starting life again at the end of the journey—had been drowned. When the water went down, they trudged on their way, but the little son never seemed able to retain his strength and that afternoon he died.

More fearful than flood and starvation was the ever-present threat of attack by hostile religious hordes along the way. Hatreds had been so whipped up by the political pressures which had divided the nations that a new morality had developed. All members of a different religious group were fair prey for loot and murder. Travel by train was still more dangerous than by road because of the ease with which a crowded refugee train could be switched off the main tracks and, while being shunted back and forth, attacked and looted. The railway station in Amritsar was a place of dread for Muslims. Amritsar, the holy city of the Sikhs and therefore the centre of an especially militant form of fanaticism, was the last big junction which Muslim refugee trains had to pass through before crossing into Pakistan. I remember visiting the frightfully littered railway station after an attack which had cost the lives of a thousand Muslim refugees, and seeing a row of dignified-looking Sikhs, venerable in their long beards and wearing the bright blue turbans of the militant Akali sect, sitting cross-legged all along the platform. Each patriarchal figure held a long curved sabre across his knees—waiting quietly for the next train. The Muslims were not always the victims. Trainloads of Sikhs and Hindus emigrating to India had hours of equal dread when passing through Lahore, the last great rail junction before they escaped from Pakistan. Hindu-Sikh convoys on the Pakistan highroads were a constant temptation to Muslim raiders.

Once I was plunged into one of these attacks while working on the 'Great Migration' story for *Life*. I was travelling with Lee



Eitingon Frizell, who was collecting caption material as I took pictures. Gathering our material kept us criss-crossing through a four-hundred-mile stretch of the Punjab. We had been warned that the job was impossible for women. Transportation would be difficult. There were lurid reports of women being abducted by raiding gangs. Lee and I did not concern ourselves overmuch with the abduction reports, but finding the right driver for each day's work was a constant problem, as our driver must be acceptable to the religious faction which we might be covering. If we were going to cross borders we needed a neutral driver.

On this occasion we had borrowed a British captain who, although assigned to the Pakistan Army, was still sufficiently neutral for our needs. The day had been filled with sad discoveries. For the first time, Lee and I saw cholera; we had visited an improvised hospital in Kasur where I photographed eight hundred victims lying on the floor. Some, we were told, would pull through, although their appearance made us doubtful. Their lives depended partly on how much nourishment they had been able to get on the roads before the disease struck them down. The sight of these helpless sufferers had made me feel very bitter. These were innocent peasants; some had been driven from their ancestral homes; the others had listened to the drumming of religious slogans and left home to pursue a dream.

Driving back to Lahore in the dusk, we suddenly saw the fields come alive, as though dragons' teeth had sprouted, with hordes of men carrying long poles mounted with knives. They were running forward, and as we rounded a bend in the road we came on a truck-load of refugees, apparently Hindus ambushed in hostile Muslim territory. Already swarming figures had reached the top of the truck, throwing down mattresses and other loot, while one of the attackers thrashed away with a hatchet. The screams were terrifying. The captain stopped our jeep, jumped out, and ordered the raiders off, firing his revolver into the air. But the truck was blocked by an improvised barricade of heavy wire coils and fencing, and while he dragged the barricade away the mob stormed up the back of the truck again. They flailed away with their spears and hatchets as Lee and I sat in the jeep three yards away feeling more helpless than ever before in our lives. The captain shot one

of the attackers off; the others scampered down into the dusk, and some stray shots followed our jeep as we drove away.

We went on with the convoys week after week until our hair became stiff and grey with dust, our clothes felt like emery boards, my cameras became clogged with grit, and the endless procession of misery we were portraying seemed, as Lee described it, 'wrapped in a horrible nightmarish grey lighting, where the heartbreaking sight of human suffering was mercifully blurred by our own physical weariness.' But long after the last of my negatives and Lee's captions had been dispatched by air to *Life*, and Lee herself had flown to another part of the world on a new assignment, those millions of peasants were still trudging blindly forward on their tragic journey. The total of Sikhs and Hindus leaving Pakistan had reached four million, but with six million Muslims coming in, this infant Land of the Pure seemed in danger of being swept away by the very numbers of the pure pouring into it.

No matter where these Muslim peasants had lived in India, they knew exactly where they wanted to live in Pakistan. Everybody wanted a farm in Lyallpur. There is no richer land in the whole Indian subcontinent, and when the national dividing line was drawn between the East and West Punjab, Lyallpur fell in Pakistan. Less than thirty years ago the Lyallpur district had been wilderness. Then it was settled by the Sikhs. In addition to being the most warlike people of India, this fiercely independent Hindu sect also makes the sturdiest farmers. Having received this acreage of jungle as a premium for fighting in the first World War, the Sikhs cleared the forests, dug canals, and tilled the fields. Within a single generation they had begun reaping rich harvests of wheat, cotton, and oilseeds, and had built their strong-walled villages, each centred around its sacred gurdwara in which they gathered to worship their one God.

This basic Sikh religious principal, worshipping one God as the Muslims do, instead of a whole hierarchy of gods (along with trees, rivers, and the sacred cow) as do other Hindus, made it seem unreasonable that Sikhs and Muslims should be at each other's throats in the religious bloodshed which was sweeping India. This was only one of many things which were to make me



wonder increasingly whether the 'religious wars' were really religious at all, or whether they weren't being used as a cloak for something else. And later I was to learn more about the practical uses of these so-called religious differences.

For the bewildered Sikhs out on the roads, disaster had fallen so suddenly that they couldn't guess at the cause. 'Our leaders didn't tell us we would have to leave our land,' they told me, as they plodded away from the land which they had carved out of the wilderness and over which they had sweated so much. Over and over I heard Sikh peasants say, 'We thought it was an understood thing that we would get the whole of the Punjab. We heard we were going to have our own Sikhistan.'

Those who left the Lyallpur district were particularly stunned by their swift eviction. In this group of villages, Muslims made up only 25 to 40 per cent of the population and had always lived on comradely terms with the Sikh farmers. When bloodshed started in surrounding districts, their Muslim neighbours said, 'There will be no trouble here. We have been living here as brothers.' But the hatreds which had been unleashed to achieve partition could not be caged; rather, they ran wild when division on religious lines became a reality. Isolated peasant groups were powerless to resist the stampede of terror.

I remember Gurdit Singh, who told me how the crisis grew. Gurdit Singh and his brothers and brothers' wives were part of a gigantic convoy with its thousands of ox-drawn carts packed muzzle to wheel in a solidly moving column eighteen miles long. I had a chance to talk with them when they were halted on the road by a broken cart wheel. I had stopped to watch the desperate drama of fixing the wheel, the cart top-heavy with its creaking load of bicycles, bedding, farm tools, and frying pans, and the men straining at the wagon shaft, looking like some strange breed of earth giants with their beards and hairy arms and eyebrows caked with dust and angry flies in whirling clouds around their heads. When the cart was mended they paused for a few moments and told me of the sudden terror that had descended on their village.

The first night it was just a small knot of Muslims who gathered in the sugar-cane field outside their village wall, and shouted, 'Come out. Come out.' But the next night their entire village was

ringed with Muslims who must have come from far off, since they outnumbered those in their own neighbourhood. By midnight the air was frightening with their cries of '*Allah ho Akbar*' ('God is great')—the battle cry of the Muslims. As the Sikhs mounted anxious watch on their rooftops, they could see a red glow on the horizon which told them other villages were being sacked and burned. Just before dawn, the Muslim schoolmaster slipped through the lines. 'Do not leave,' he said. 'We Mussulmans have always lived in peace with you here in Lyallpur. We will protect you. We will die with you.' But the next night the beating of a large drum sounded from the sugar cane. This, the Sikhs knew, was the signal of attack. The skyline was vivid with fires, and at midnight the schoolteacher came again. 'We cannot help now,' he said, and he wept as he delivered a written ultimatum which he, as the most literate member of the community, had been instructed to write out. It read: 'This is our country. You must go away. You may not take any movable property as the land and the property belong to Pakistan.'

Knowing that a large convoy was forming at Beloki Head, the villagers sent a request at dawn to the town hall, asking for an escort to start them on their way. The District Magistrate sent soldiers to protect them while they loaded whatever belongings their carts would carry. Then he sealed their houses in the hope of keeping out looters, and provided an escort for the Sikhs as they left to join the great exodus toward the Indian Union.

With regret the District Magistrate, himself a Muslim, watched these expert Sikh tillers go. It would take some time before the incoming refugees, who had grown up in another type of agriculture, would develop comparable skill in handling the irrigation channels and spillways. Already the cycle of harvest and planting had been disrupted throughout the entire area where populations were being exchanged. Delay in the next crop would intensify the coming food shortage, inevitable with the ever-growing flood of refugees.

Meanwhile there seemed hardly a person who was not nursing some loss, such as the rich Muslim woman from Amritsar who had thrown her jewels in the bottom of the well, when her home fell on the Indian side of the line. She had run across the border to



Pakistan, and when I saw her there she was trying hysterically to hire a diver to go back and retrieve the jewels from the well. And there was the horse breeder who raised some of the finest horses in the country, who got caught by partition with his mares in Pakistan and his stallions in India. He had sent the stallions off to graze in the foothills of Kashmir, as he had done every summer, never thinking that the greater part of Kashmir, a predominantly Muslim state, might ever be a part of the Indian Union.

The problems multiplied. The banks in Pakistan had almost ceased to function; bank clerks were Hindus, so they had fled. Whole streets of shops stood empty; shopkeepers were largely Hindu, and they had carried their liquid capital to India. That huge pile of modernistic architecture, the Karachi Cotton Exchange, was an empty, echoing vault; cotton brokers were Hindu, and out of three hundred brokers all but ten had fled to India. Pakistan's 'Golden Fibre', her jute wealth, piled up within her borders; the jute mills were all in India. The steel mills were in India. There was not a single match factory in Pakistan. On the other hand, in India, leather workers, tailors, mechanics, electricians had been Muslim. The telephone network suffered, dial phones lapsed into disrepair, communications between cities became increasingly undependable and sporadic.

Since the time of my first arrival in India a year and a half before Independence Day, I had watched the constant jockeying for position which had finally resulted in the creation not of a single, free, united nation but of these handicapped twins. I remember the many times when bloodshed had broken out during the preliminary sparring and the Pakistan promoters had said, 'We must have our separate nation, or we will not have peace.' But now that this separate nation had become a reality the people had not achieved peace. It was a little too soon to find out just what they had achieved.

'Whoever thought Pakistan would mean this to a Mussulman!' one of the weary pilgrims said to me as he trudged toward his Promised Land.

'We were promised a Sikhistan,' said the Sikhs, as they journeyed from the land to which they had given so much, 'but now we no longer expect to see happy days.' And one of them, whom

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I shall always remember for the great dignity of his bearing in spite of the dust which caked his turban and patriarchal beard, added: 'For the Mussulmans too the future is dark. They are helpless just like us. They have been rendered homeless just as we have been. They are victims of the same fate.'



## Chapter II

### DIRECT ACTION IN CALCUTTA

WHY had the fearful Great Migration come to pass? Why were millions of people wrenched from their ancestral homes and driven toward an unknown, often unwanted 'Promised Land'? For years Hindus and Muslims had struggled side by side for independence from British rule. With freedom finally on the horizon, why should India begin to tear herself in two along religious lines?

The overt act that split India began in the streets of Calcutta. But the decision was made in Bombay. It was a one-man decision, and the man who made it was cool, calculating, unreligious. This determination to establish a separate Islamic state came not—as one might have expected—from some Muslim divine in archaic robes and flowing beard, but from a thoroughly Westernized, English-educated attorney-at-law with a clean-shaven face and razor-sharp mind. Mahomed Ali Jinnah, leader of the Muslim League and architect of Pakistan, had for many years worked at the side of Nehru and Gandhi for a free, united India, until in the evening of his life he broke sharply with his past to achieve a separate Pakistan.

Jinnah lived to see himself ruler of the world's largest Islamic nation before he died in September 1948, at the age of seventy-two, but I think of him as reaching his pinnacle of power two years before his death, when freedom-with-unity appeared on the verge of becoming a reality and he took the momentous steps that crushed all hopes for a united India.

Jinnah's Press conference at his Bombay home on Malabar Hill, in late July 1946, marked the public turning point. It was so unusual for the Quaid-i-Azam, or 'Great Leader', to call a Press conference that both foreign and Indian reporters rushed eagerly to attend it. Nor were they disappointed: Jinnah intimated—rather boldly—the coming of Direct Action Day. Two and a half weeks later this day touched off a chain of events that led, after

twelve explosive months, to a divided India and the violent disruptions of the Great Migration.

Until then most of us had thought the differences between the Congress Party and the Muslim League would somehow be resolved and that freedom would bring a united nation. Jinnah's arguments for division were all familiar: that the Muslims in India were outnumbered three to one by Hindus and would be crushed under Hindu domination; that Hindus worshipped the cow while Muslims ate the cow; that religion, customs, culture all made Muslims different from Hindus. Opponents of the two-nation theory maintained that Hindus and Muslims could not be so different, since there was no racial difference. Ninety-five per cent of India's Muslims were just converted Hindus. Even Mr Jinnah, they were fond of pointing out, had a Hindu grandfather.

For my part, I believe that the tragic weakness of the Indian leaders during this crucial period was their failure to take a firm stand against the forces of Indian feudalism. A spellbinder with slogans found it all too easy to galvanize the pent-up suffering of centuries into one powerful current of religious hatred. That this was done by an ambitious lawyer in Western dress and of unorthodox habits makes it all the clearer that religion was used like a document plucked from a brief case.

There was a good deal of the successful lawyer about Jinnah that midsummer morning of the press conference, as he stood on the steps of his spacious veranda receiving the reporters. A pencil-thin monochrome in grey and silver, with perfectly tailored suit and tie and socks precisely matching his hair, his manner with us was courteous but formal. As he fitted his monocle to his eye and began to speak, there was something consciously theatrical about Mr Jinnah—reminiscent of that most un-Islamic chapter of his past when he was a Shakespearean actor in England.

His statement to the Press was in the form of a monologue, delivered in an icy voice, which was a forecast of fiery events to come. 'We are preparing to launch a struggle. We have chalked out a plan.' We reporters, although we sat around Jinnah in a close circle, had almost to stop our breathing to hear his curiously hushed words. He had decided to boycott the Constituent Assembly. He was rejecting in its entirety the British plan for transfer



of power to an interim government which would combine both the League and the Congress. He lashed out against the 'Hindu-dominated Congress' in his flat, chilled monotone. It seemed clear, now the bondage to the British was drawing to an end, that he was free to concentrate all his fire against the opposite party.

'We are forced in our own self-protection to abandon constitutional methods.' His thin lips slit into a frigid smile. 'The decision we have taken is a very grave one.' If the Muslims were not granted their separate Pakistan they would launch 'direct action'. The phrase caught all of us. What form would direct action take, we all wanted to know. 'Go to the Congress and ask them their plans,' Mr Jinnah snapped. 'When they take you into their confidence I will take you into mine.'

There was silence for a moment, broken only by the cooing of pigeons hopping over Jinnah's shaven lawn. Then he added in the same toneless voice, so strangely unmatched to his words: 'Why do you expect me alone to sit with folded hands? I also am going to make trouble.'

Next day the Quaid-i-Azam changed out of his double-breasted suit and put on Muslim dress and fez for the Muslim masses. Standing on a platform liberally decorated with enlargements of his portrait, he announced that the sixteenth of August, two and a half weeks hence, would be 'Direct Action Day'. His vituperation against the Congress was acidly explicit. 'If you want peace, we do not want war,' he declared. 'If you want war we accept your offer unhesitatingly. We will either have a divided India or a destroyed India.' And the Muslim Leaguers jumped up on their seats and tossed their fezzes in the air.

It was a battle between politicians now. The papers blazed with accusations from both sides—League and Congress equally intolerant in their attacks. The opposing streams of fiery words had a terrible effect on the emotional Indian people. Passions mounted during the crucial fortnight; Direct Action Day dawned in an atmosphere of dread and foreboding.

Most of what I learned about that day came from a little tea-shop keeper in Calcutta, where the explosion began. As soon as I heard of the incredible events taking place, I had flown from Bombay to Calcutta. The disruption of normal city life was so

great that it was some time before I could make my way to the ruined heart of the bazaar district. Hunting for a survivor who had been an eye-witness to the first stroke of direct action, I found Nanda Lal, in the wreckage of his teashop.

Nanda Lal's little 'East Bengal Cabin', at 36 Harrison Road, was located in one of those potential trouble spots where a by-lane of Muslim shops crossed the Hindu-dominated thoroughfare. Nanda Lal was a Hindu and wore the traditional dhoti, twisted diaperlike between his legs. A patch of grizzled hair stood out on his walnut-coloured chest, and a narrow silver amulet gleamed on his thin upper arm. Like many Bengalis, he was fairly well educated and spoke a little English.

The 'East Bengal Cabin', with its elongated oven fronting the pavement, looked much like an Asiatic version of a Nedick's stand. The Hindu clerks of the Minerva Banking Corporation opposite were frequent customers, as were the boarders in the 'Happy Home Boarding House' near-by. Although Nanda Lal was in the protective shadow of these impressive Hindu establishments, the Muslim quarter began just round the corner in Mirzapore Street, too close for security.

On the morning of August 16th, Nanda Lal started his oven and set out his tray of sweetmeats as usual. When his little son came out with the jars of mango pickle and chutney, he commented to the child that the streets looked reassuringly quiet. The sacred cows that roam freely through the thoroughfares of Calcutta were sleeping as usual in the middle of the car tracks, and rose to their feet reluctantly, as they always did, when the first tramcar of the day clanged down Harrison Road.

It was the sight of that first tram that confirmed Nanda Lal's fears that this day was to be unlike all other days. Normally it was so crowded that they bulged from the platform and clung to the doorsteps and back of the car. Today there was hardly a passenger on board.

Then things began happening so quickly that Nanda Lal could hardly recall them in sequence. But he did remember quite clearly the seven lorries that came thundering down Harrison Road. Men armed with brickbats and bottles began leaping out of the lorries—Muslim 'goondas', or gangsters, Nanda Lal decided,



since they immediately fell to tearing up Hindu shops. Some rushed into the furniture store next to the 'Happy Home' and began tossing mattresses and furniture into the street. Others ran toward the 'Bengal Cabin', but Nanda Lal was fastening up the blinds by now, shouting to his son to run back into the house, straining to bar the windows and close the door.

He could hear a pelting sound beating up the street, the hammering noise of a hail of stones. He was too busy getting the windows barred to take much notice of the fact that he was hit in several places and his leg and head were bleeding. He managed to get inside by the time the ruffians reached his shop; he could hear them banging against his door as he double-barred it from the inside; then he raced across the inner courtyard.

The court was edged with tenements and closed from the outside by a wall. Nanda Lal could hear goondas climbing the wall, shouting: 'Beat them up! Beat them up!' A head rose over the wall, and then several figures started pulling themselves up into view. But by that time some of Nanda Lal's numerous relatives, who lived in his flat, had taken up a counter-offensive from the terrace and the invaders were driven back under a shower of flower pots.

In the breathing spell offered by this successful move, two of his wife's uncles ran down and helped Nanda Lal build a barricade at the foot of the stairs which would jam shut the door leading to their flat. Whatever benches and tables they could lay their hands on, they piled against the door and at the foot of the stairs. Nanda Lal snatched three bicycles from the vestibule and jammed them in amidst the furniture. Then they all ran up to the top floor of the flat, where the women of the house were huddled in the upper hallway.

Nanda Lal peeped cautiously out of a window. Never had he seen the streets so filled with clawing, surging mobs. In front of the Happy Home, some broken rickshaws had been added to the heap of mattresses, and flames were rising from the pile. When the wind shifted the smoke, Nanda Lal could glimpse figures on the bank steps shaking up pop bottles and hurling them into the crowds—the bottles bursting like hand grenades when they landed. Flames were racing through the dress goods swinging

from racks in front of the 'Goddess of Plenty' dress shop and through the crowded living quarters behind the rows of shops. Nanda Lal suspected that much of this was the organized work of goondas. In India 'goondaism' is a profession; goondas abound in a port city such as Calcutta, where they do a brisk trade in smuggling but may also be hired for strike-breaking or religious outbreaks.

Later in the morning Nanda Lal climbed to the roof. Looking down, he saw boys, wearing the green arm-bands of Muslim League volunteers, weaving their way through the crowds and heading toward Ripon College. Drawn in a new direction, the entire mob began pressing down Harrison Road toward the college. Like all Indian colleges, Ripon had long been a crucible of seething politics. With the recent emphasis on Hindu-Muslim differences, the religious fanaticism infecting politics had had explosive effects on the students. The violent fighting at the fortress-like base of the college, one street away, was hidden from Nanda Lal's view, but he could see a desperate battle in progress on the roof. The skirmish centred about the orange, green, and white tri-colour of the Congress Party, which had been raised on the flagpole by Hindu students early that morning. Through the struggling knots of youngsters he could catch flashes of green as the opposition beat their way to the pole with their own Muslim League flag.

Finally the green banner, with its Islamic star and crescent, shot to the top of the pole, and the muddled shouting of the mob below changed to an articulate roar. '*Allah ho Akbar.*' ('God is great')—the slogan which the Mussulman uses impartially in prayer and in battle—swept through the streets.

The streets and by-lanes were throbbing with cries of '*Jai Hind.*' ('Victory to a united India') from the Hindus, and '*Pakistan zindabad.*' ('Long live Pakistan') from the Muslims. Suddenly this clash of slogans was punctuated by a new staccato sound. A rattle of bullets from the window of an apartment opposite the college brought cold terror to the heart of Nanda Lal. Gunfire is rare in Indian riots. A new frenzy swept the throng and the riot overflowed the bounds of Harrison Road. Through the entire city the terror and arson spread, through the crowded bazaars, the teeming chawls and tenements.



During the terrible days that followed, Nanda Lal huddled with his family and relatives in the upper hallway. Sometimes bricks and stones crashed through the windows of the outside rooms. The children cried a great deal; they were hungry as well as terrified.

One night Nanda Lal had the opportunity to help in the rescue of nine Hindu college girls. He was astonished that one of his Muslim neighbours approached him on this project. He had completely forgotten, he told me, that Mussulmans could be benevolent human beings. The evacuation plan was worked out by the proprietor of the Gulzar Shawl Repair Company, whose back alley adjoined that of the 'East Bengal Cabin'. Disguised as Muslims in the burkas with which orthodox Mohammedan women veil themselves from head to toe, the college girls were smuggled through the Muslim quarter and into a Hindu area. The Shawl Repair Company provided the burkas, and Nanda Lal's help was enlisted in this joint humanitarian project because his courtyard connected Muslim and Hindu streets and furnished the girls with a good refuge to don their disguises.

On the fourth day Nanda Lal noted that the weapons in the street fighting had grown heavier. Soda-water bottles had given way to iron staves, and unfortunately the neighbourhood had a plentiful supply of rails from the fence surrounding the near-by Shraddhananda Park. Finally, as the skirmish of the iron pikes reached its fiercest, a convoy of three military tanks rolled through and machine-gunned the mobs, and along with them the police made their belated appearance.

The police had refused to come out without military escort. In the past their loyalty had been to the King and they had quelled demonstrations in which their own countrymen, both Hindu and Muslim, were demanding Independence, and now they feared their own people might turn against them. When the militia was at last ordered out—and when Muslim and Hindu leaders finally put aside their own differences and made joint appeals—the riots began dying down.

When peace returned to Calcutta on the fifth day, the streets were a rubble of broken bricks and bottles, bloated remains of cows, and charred wrecks of automobiles and victorias rising

above the strewn figures of the dead. The human toll had reached six thousand according to official count, and sixteen thousand according to unofficial sources. In this great city, as large as Detroit, vast areas were dark with ruin and black with the wings of vultures that hovered impartially over the Hindu and Muslim dead.

Thousands began fleeing Calcutta. For days the bridge over the Hooghly river, one of the longest steel spans in the world, was a one-way current of men, women, children, and domestic animals, headed toward the Howrah railway station. Finding the trains could not carry them all, the people settled down to wait on the concrete floor, dividing themselves automatically into Hindu and Muslim camps. Under the gloomy cavern of the depot the Hindu portion of the human carpet was easily recognizable by its white cows, each encircled lovingly by the family to which it belonged. As each train came in, throngs of people scrambled wildly over the gates, hoping to cling on somehow and be carried to villages where they hoped they would be safe.

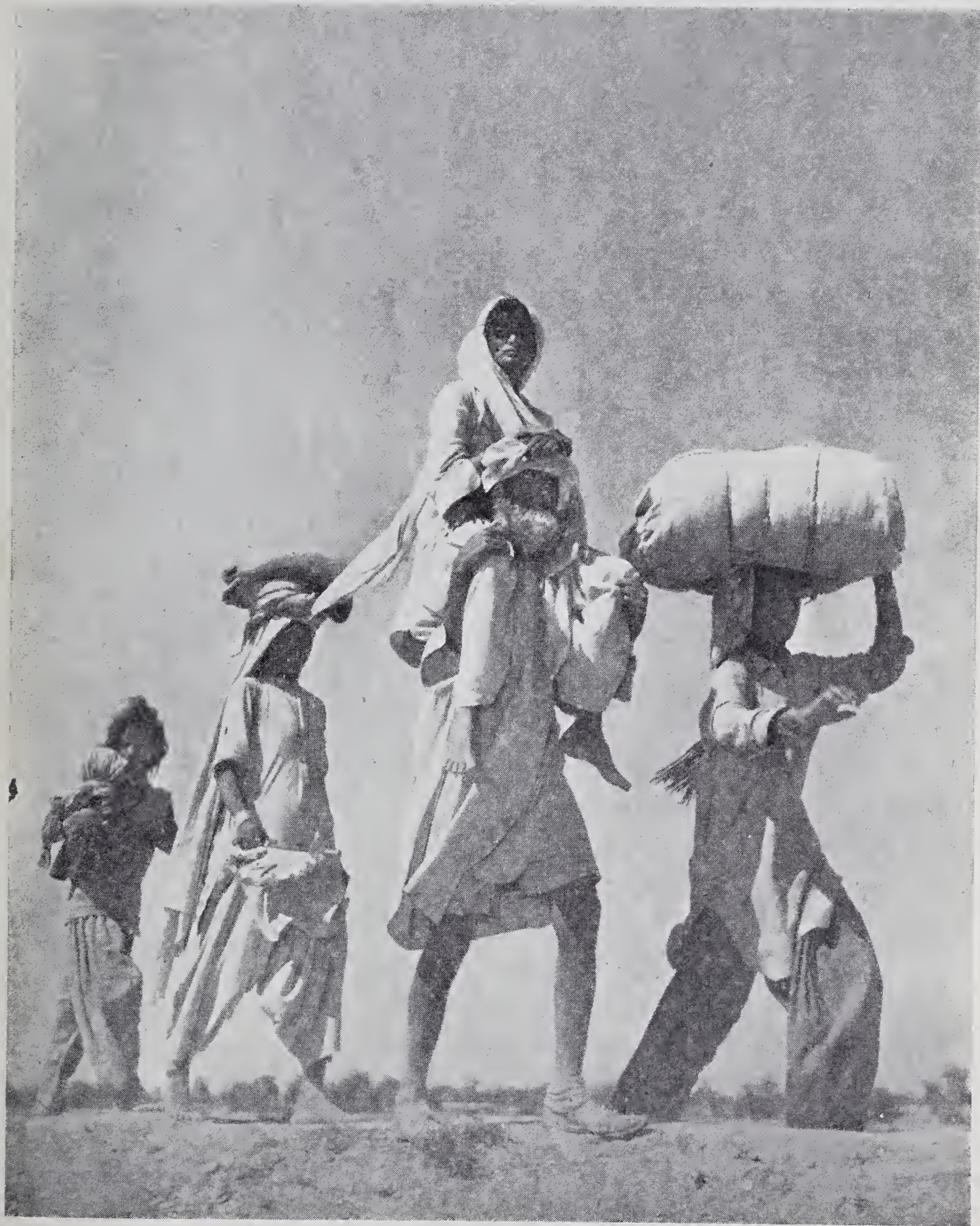
But fast as the refugees fled, they could not keep ahead of the swiftly spreading tide of disaster. Calcutta was only the beginning of a chain reaction of riot, counter-riot, and reprisal which stormed through India for an entire year.

The next link in the chain was the Noakhali area in southeastern Bengal. Here in the uncharted recesses of swampy lowlands and hyacinth-choked bayous I talked with Hindus who had abandoned their villages *en masse* and fled to the river banks. They had strange tales to tell of forced conversion to Islam, of being compelled to throw the images of their gods into the water and to eat the meat of the sacred cow. One woman wept hysterically as she told me how her home was 'polluted' by Muslim goondas, who placed raw meat on the window sills.

Gandhi—though he was far too old to endure such hardship—went to Noakhali and tramped on foot through marshes and jungle trying to restore confidence to the villagers. Trade-unions and peasant organizations threw their weight toward unity. It is significant that throughout the worst of the disruption in Bengal, five million Hindu and Muslim sharecroppers campaigned together in the Tebhaga movement for long-overdue land reforms. Wherever

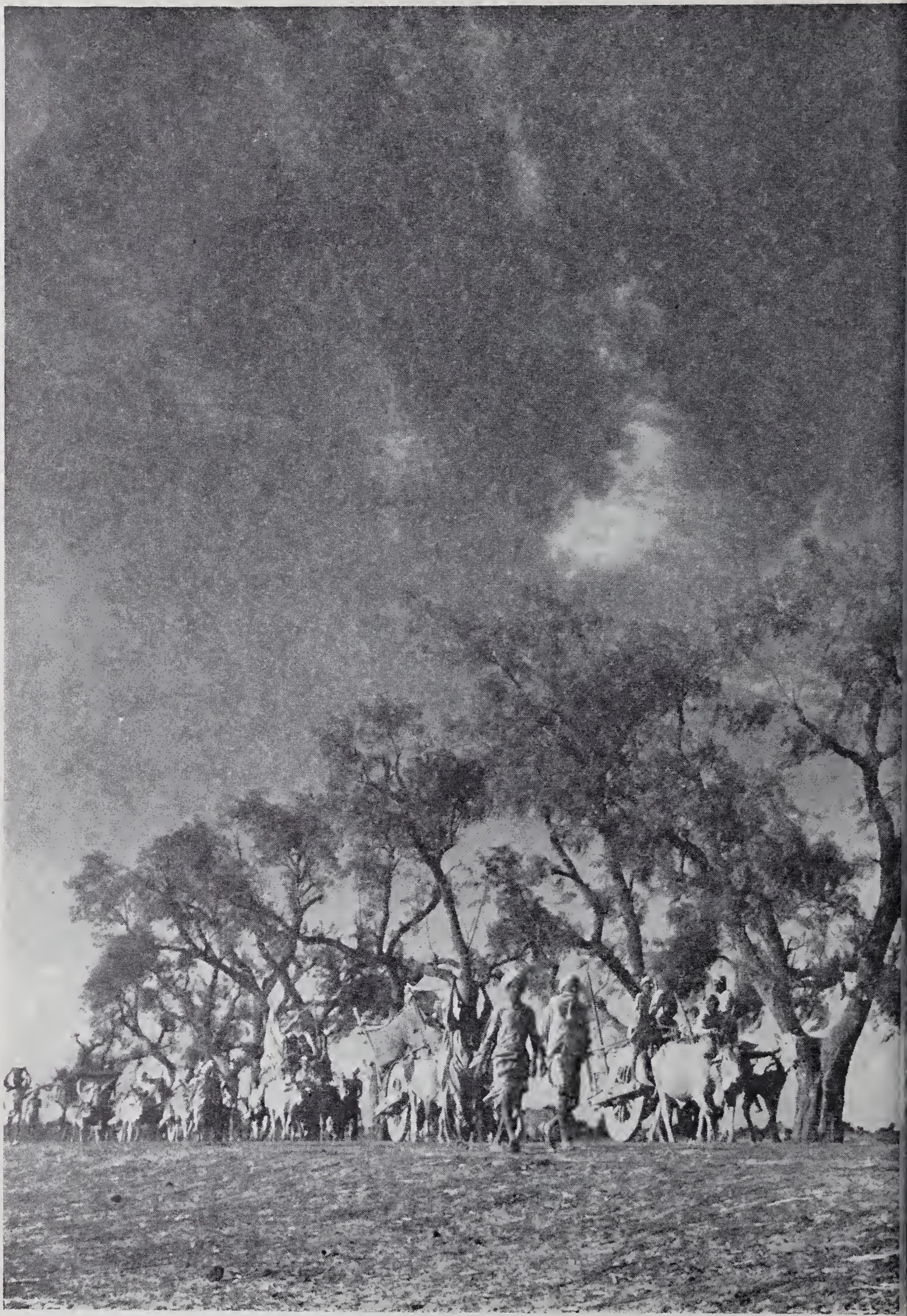


# THE GREAT MIGRATION



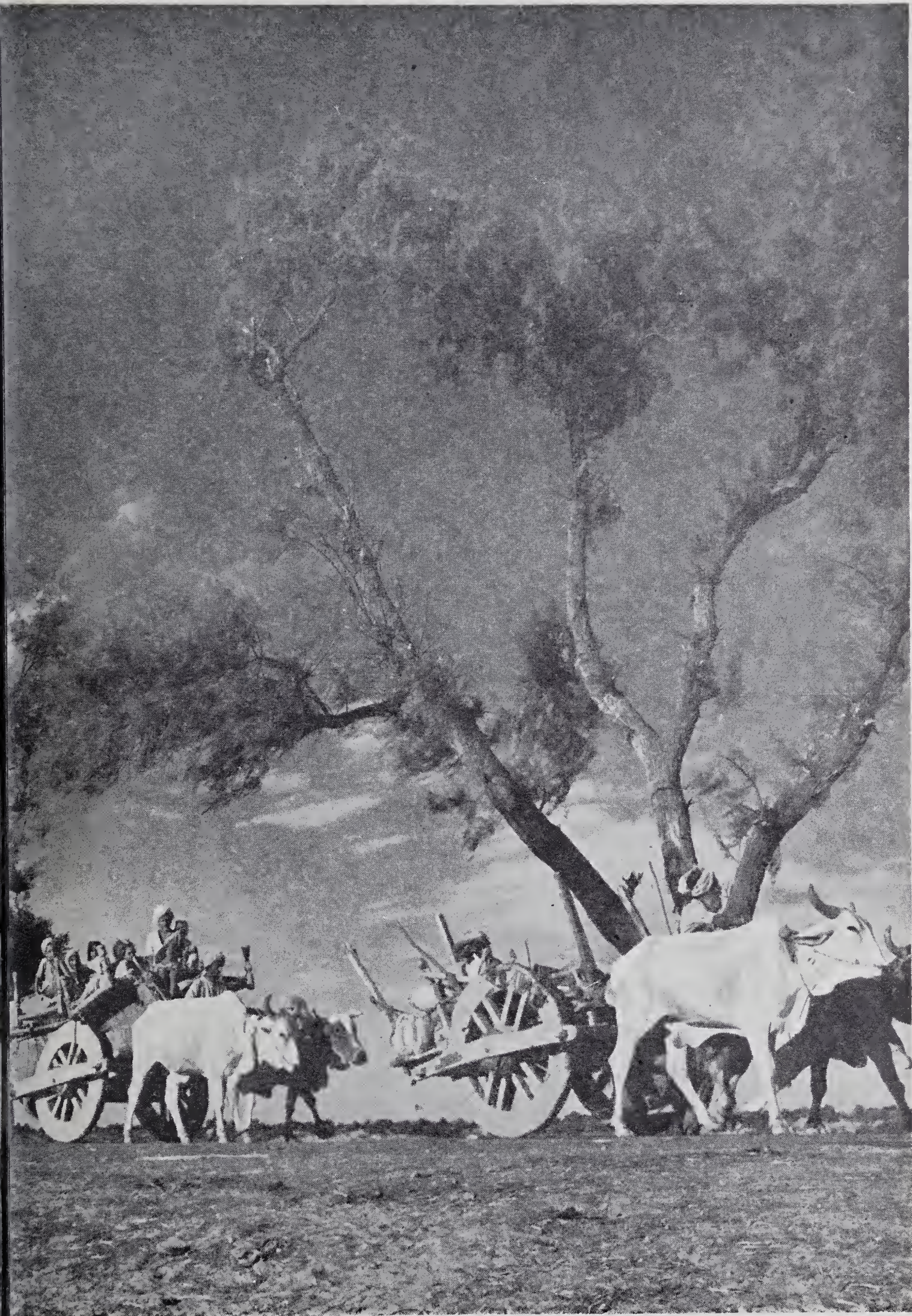
*The Great Migration, formally known as 'Exchange of Populations'.*





*Beset by famine, cholera, exhaustion, and bandits, millions of refugees took to the*





*roads—Hindus and Sikhs to India, Muslims to Pakistan.*





*The strong survive: a Sikh family making their way to India.*





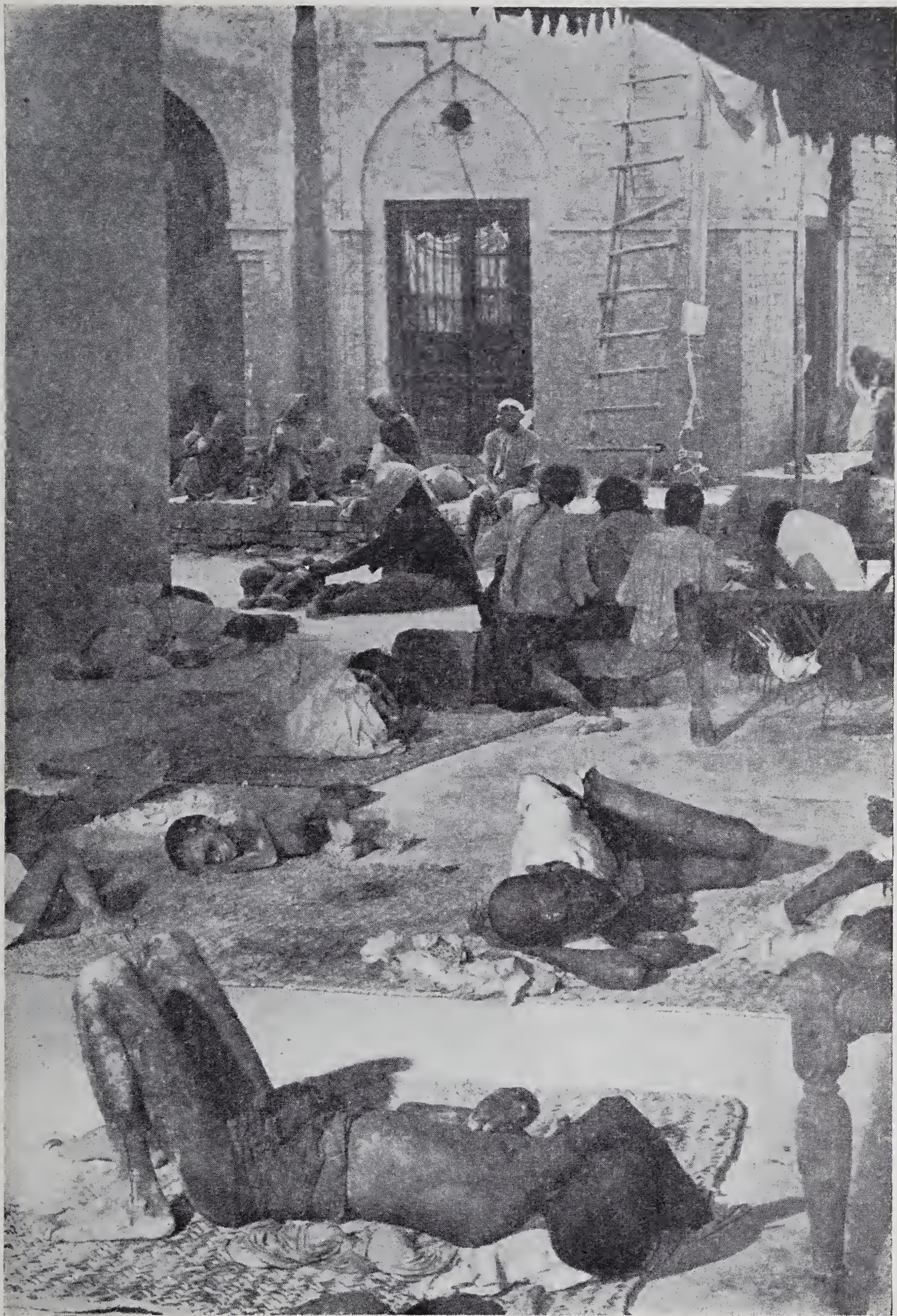
*Seeking sanctuary and shelter in Sher Shah's mosque.*





*The remains of a refugee encampment trapped by flood.*





*Cholera hospital.*





*The old and weak fall by the way; the caravan has gone on.*





*At the graveside.*

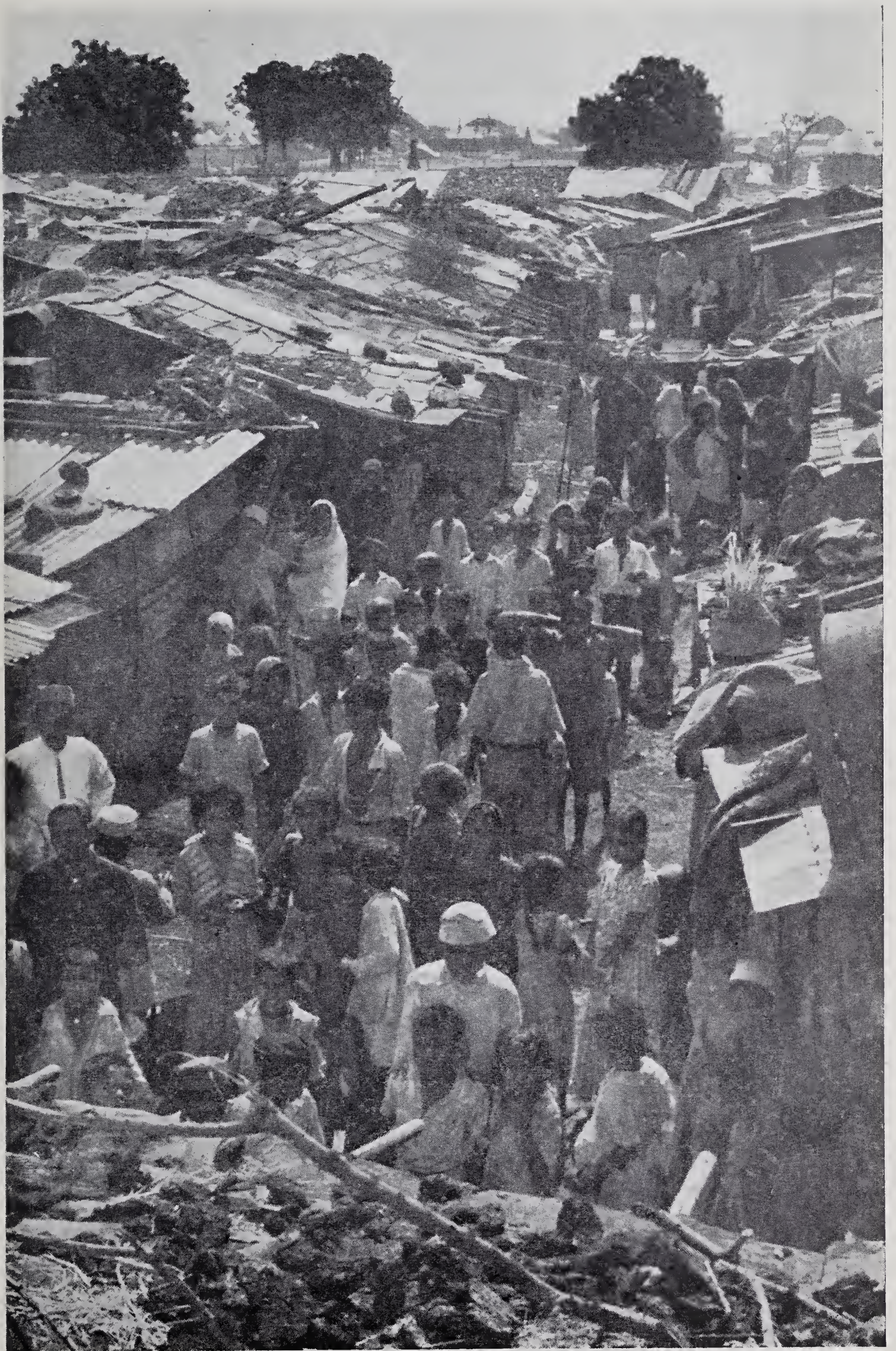


## THE INDIAN CITIES



*A busy Calcutta corner.*





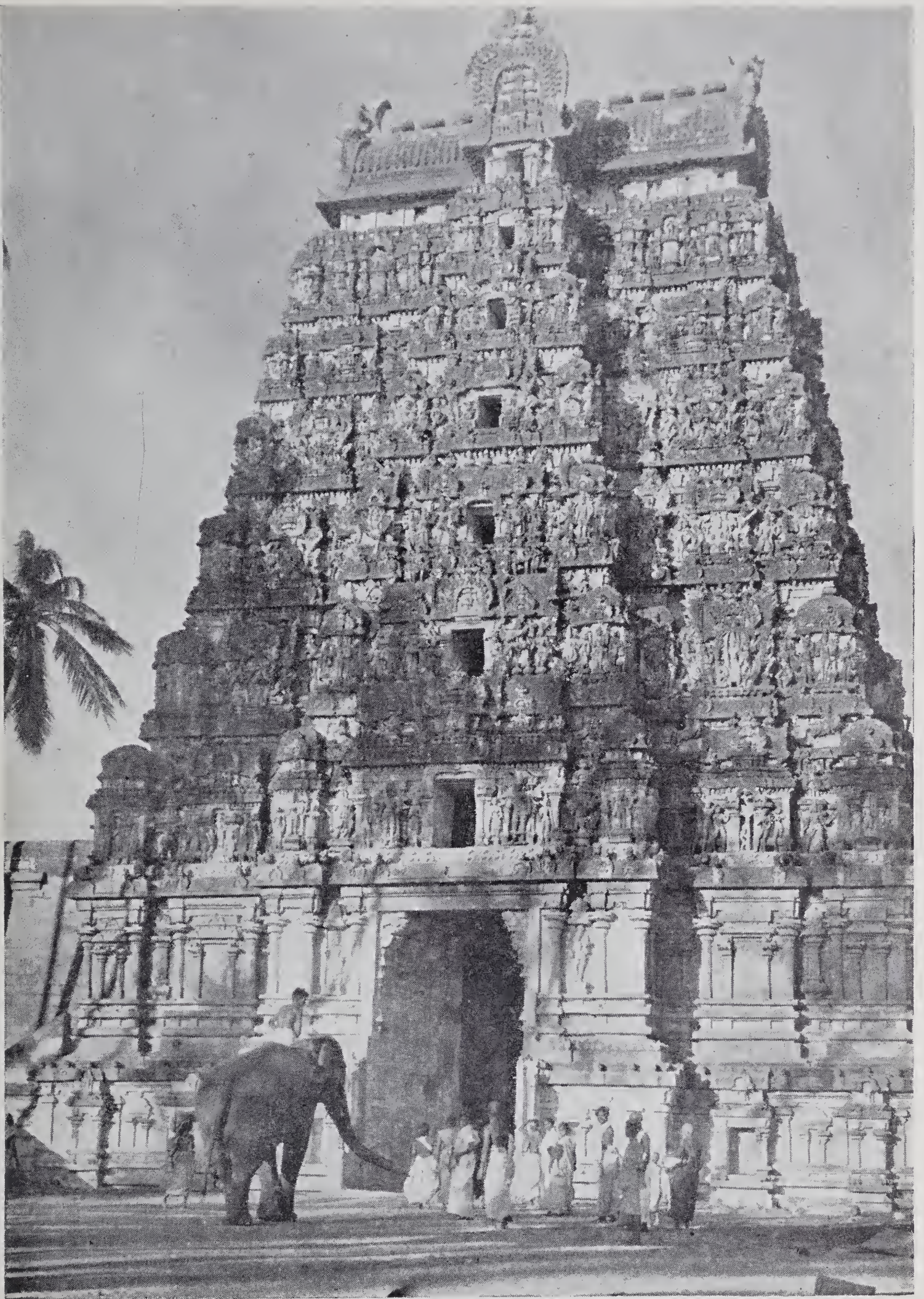
*The chawls, where millions of Indians live, do not even deserve the title of slums.*





*Hindu temple in Srirangam.*





*Kutb Minar, an Islamic monument in Delhi outside the boundaries of Pakistan.*

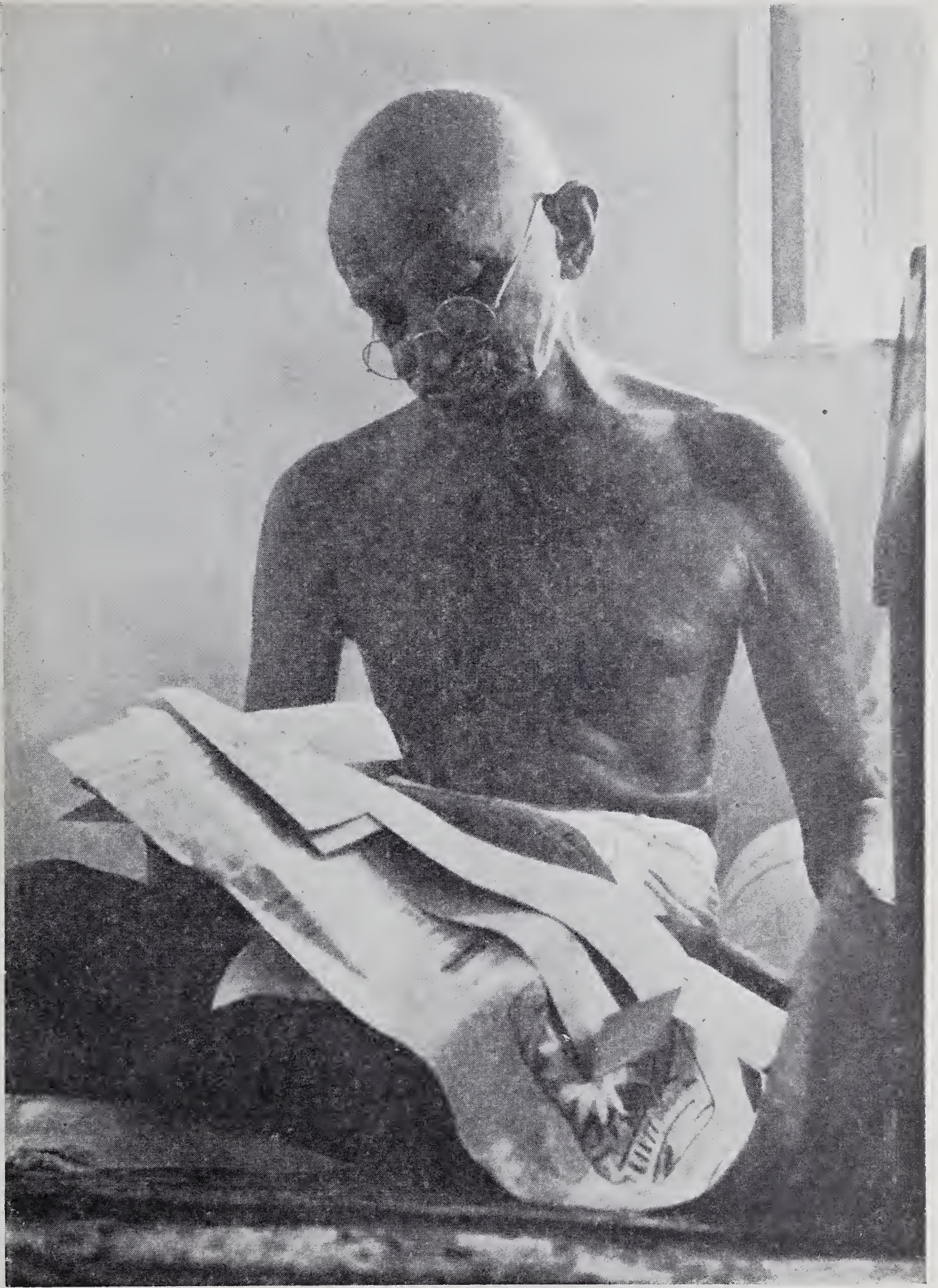


# GANDHIJI



*At the spinning wheel.*





*Keeping abreast of the latest political developments.*





*The aging mahatma walking with his grand-daughter Sita and his grand-niece Abbha, at dawn after prayers.*



## DIRECT ACTION IN CALCUTTA

there was constructive leadership toward some goal of social betterment, religious strife dwindled to the vanishing point.

But between these small islands of Hindu-Muslim co-operation were the burning villages, the blazing fanaticisms. The sparks of Bengal flew westward to the state of Bihar, where Hindus wreaked merciless vengeance on the Muslim minority. The flames of Bihar fanned out to the Punjab and touched off explosions that dwarfed even the Calcutta riots.

Months of violence sharpened the divisions, emphasized Jinnah's arguments, achieved partition. On August 15, 1947, exactly one day less than a year after Nanda Lal had seen direct action break out on his doorstep, a bleeding Pakistan was carved out of the body of a bleeding India.



## Chapter III

### 'HE IS A MAN OF GOD'

WHEN Mahatma Gandhi decided, in January 1948, to go on a fast in the hope of 'bringing peace to the hearts of the people of all religions in India', no one knew of his decision except one woman.

This would be the sixteenth fast of Gandhi's life. It was more of a bombshell than the previous fifteen had been. The others had been directed against the British Raj, but this was a hunger strike against the omissions of the new free government which Gandhi himself had done so much to create.

The sixteenth fast caused more anxiety than the others. Gandhi was now seventy-eight; this fast could be his last. I was certain that no one would feel this more keenly than Sushila—the woman who knew—for Sushila Nayyar had been for many years Gandhi's personal physician.

This self-effacing little woman, with her plain and yearning face, had been a small schoolgirl when she first saw Gandhi. A native of West Punjab, she had come to Lahore to be with her older brother, Pyarelal, while she studied English, and later, medicine. Pyarelal, while an arts student at the University of Lahore, had attended meetings which Gandhi addressed on the subject of 'Quit India'. Through her brother, Sushila, as she grew older, was drawn into the Gandhian circle. The brother and sister were on the threshold of new dedicated lives; they were soon to leave their studies to devote their services to Gandhi, Sushila as his medical attendant and Pyarelal as a combined secretary and literary assistant, writing notes for Gandhi's magazines and newspapers.

Their first sight of Gandhi, the brother and sister told me, was like a new horizon breaking on their view. For thousands of other students who poured out of the colleges to join the 'Quit India' movement, and for millions of Indians during the 'twenties and 'thirties, Gandhi was undoubtedly widening the horizon. The endearing contribution of Gandhi to this naturally alert but long-downtrodden people was that through him they learned to raise their heads, forget their fears, and regain their self-respect as a



nation. Under his inspired leadership the people began gathering strength through the very act of working together for independence.

While the Indian people had to wipe out the cramping restrictions of colonial rule if they were going to progress, they had no weapons for the fight. Gandhi came with a new political weapon, fashioned to fit an oppressed, unarmed people. By ‘non-violent non-co-operation’—refusing to pay taxes, boycotting British goods, filling the jails—the masses could exert their pressure on the government. Non-co-operation was such a new thing in those days that in 1920, when Pyarelal first talked with Gandhi, nothing yet had been written about it. The beginning of Pyarelal’s life-long relationship with the Mahatma came when Gandhi asked the college student to write a thesis on ‘the theory and practice of non-co-operation’. Gandhi apparently liked the finished piece, for he told Pyarelal he wanted ‘to make use of his pen and brains’.

Pyarelal and Sushila were only two among the many Indians I had questioned about their first sight of Gandhi. Even among people who disapproved of Gandhi, almost everyone referred to some period in his life when Gandhi had been a dynamic influence. But I attached the greatest value to the impression of these members of his intimate circle, because I wanted to learn just what qualities in Gandhi could move people to drop everything and follow him.

They were drawn, Pyarelal explained to me, by the ‘radiance’ about him, by the ‘granite-like strength combined with terrific calm’, by ‘something of activity in the voice.’ Pyarelal chose his words carefully, trying to describe this precise quality of voice. ‘He spoke like someone in authority, a man with whom the frontiers of responsibility are unlimited.’ Once more Pyarelal paused until he had found just the right phrase to sum it up. ‘There is something of the prophet in him.’

‘You are using different words,’ I said. ‘Most people say “saint”.’

‘No,’ said Pyarelal quite positively, ‘my approach was not that of disciple to saint. A prophet and deliverer, that was my impression. A man who had access to an inner resource which made even kings look small and insignificant.’



During the stormy years of non-co-operation Sushila and Pyarelal were with Gandhi both in and out of jail. When Gandhi's wife grew sick in prison, Sushila tended her until her death. And now through the unexpected maelstrom which swept India with the coming of independence, Sushila watched Gandhi's diet, gave him his morning massage, and helped at prayers.

At Monday prayers Sushila had an extra duty. In addition to helping to lead the singing, which she did in a rather unmelodious voice, she read Gandhi's prayer speech aloud to the crowd. Monday was Gandhi's day of silence. On six days of the week Gandhi talked to everybody about almost everything; he advised mothers on how to bring up their babies, what to feed them and how to give them mud packs for whatever ailed them. He admonished the crowds who flocked to prayer meetings against dropping orange peels or scattering peanut shells over the ground; he lectured the heads of the government on how to run the nation. But on Mondays he uttered never a word. If something came up too urgent to be postponed till Tuesday he would scribble a line in his characteristic big scrawl.

The general opinion was that Gandhi kept quiet on Mondays so as to have more time for contemplation and prayer. But actually Gandhi prayed a great deal on all days, rising at four like all good Hindus to begin his worship at that propitious moment, that most heavenly hour, just before dawn has reached the earth. Gandhi's reason for observing the silent Mondays was to have just one full day each week when he would not have to talk at all. I have often wondered whether the weekly observance of this restful day of silence did not have as much to do with his longevity as the sacred forecasts in the ancient Upanishads—which (as Gandhi himself once explained to me) allowed him a life span of one hundred and twenty-five years.

On Mondays Gandhi jotted down in a notebook his thoughts and bits of advice for the people, and handed the book to Sushila to read aloud at the close of prayers. On the eventful Monday of January 12th, Sushila was given the notebook just five minutes before prayers began. She glanced it through just before going out into the garden to prayer meeting, and was startled to come upon the sentence: 'Fasting is the last resort in place of the sword',



followed by the announcement that Gandhi would undertake a fast directed against the savageries of religious warfare and against the moral degradation of Congressmen in the government, and with the hope of ‘regaining India’s dwindling prestige and her fast-fading sovereignty over the heart of Asia.’

It was a matter of deep shame to Gandhi that under the new freedom, which India had fought so hard to attain, this whirlwind of religious bloodshed had been unloosed. He was particularly disturbed that in Delhi, the capital, which he felt should serve as a model of religious tolerance, the Muslim minority was being treated with continuing brutality. Riotous outbreaks were intensified by Delhi’s housing shortage, a housing problem such as the city had never before seen. With the great flight of Hindus and Sikhs from their old homes in Pakistan, tens of thousands of these refugees had crowded into Delhi, only to find that there was no shelter for them. Having lost their farms and houses to hostile Muslims in Pakistan, they had begun taking forcible possession of the houses of Muslims. The Delhi police, who were largely Sikh and Hindu and therefore partisan, stood by passively and watched Muslims being evicted, looted, and murdered. When Hindu and Sikh refugees began storming into Muslim mosques and sacred tombs, throwing out Muslim worshippers and moving their own families into these holy places to live, Gandhi felt that action must be taken. One of the conditions of ending his fast was that he have proof that Muslims could go in peace and safety to their places of worship. Even after the carving out of the Muslim state of Pakistan, India still had an enormous minority of forty million Muslims within its borders; many of them had opposed partition and wanted to continue to live and work in a united India. ‘And to-day’, Gandhi wrote in his prayer message, ‘no Muslim life is safe from Hindu or Sikh dagger, bomb, or bullet.’

The fast would begin after the first meal next morning. Ever since Gandhi had come to Delhi he had felt that he should undertake this fast, but he had hesitated over the decision because ‘I did not feel sure whether it was the voice of reason or of Satan in my breast. But for the last three days I have been listening to the call of God.’

There were fewer people than usual at prayer meeting that eve-



ning to hear Sushila's dramatic announcement because Monday prayers, when people could not hear Gandhi's voice, were never well attended. Nevertheless, within a few minutes the entire nation knew. Gandhi, in spite of his prejudices against the machine age, was as quick as any other political leader to take advantage of modern methods of communication. Shortly after Independence Day he began the practice of having his nightly prayer speech broadcast to the nation, so that all his thoughts—from his bits of homely advice to parents to his suggestions on decontrolling sugar and cloth prices—went out to the four corners of the country over All-India Radio.

I was broadcasting to America that night, and I realized that conveying to Americans the significance of a Gandhi fast was not an easy matter. We have no real equivalent in America. In India people fast to bring about a variety of results. In some circles, an Indian will fast on the doorstep of someone who owes him money until the heart of the debtor is moved and he repays his debt. Mass fasts were held frequently during the fight for freedom. But no other individual Indian could launch a fast with such effect as Gandhi. Gandhi was a general to his people, and a Gandhi fast stirred the nation. In a curious way, it brought all sorts of powerful undercurrents up and out into the open.

It occurred to me that a word with Jawaharlal Nehru might make things clearer, because Nehru in his way of thought forms a kind of bridge which helps Westerners to understand the East. He was in his Prime Minister's office in the South Wing of the great, red sandstone Secretariat when I found him. His hair had grown whiter since I had seen him first, on my arrival in India almost two years before, when the British Cabinet Mission had first come to plan with Indian leaders the groundwork for independence.

The fact that independence had meant the birth of divided nations instead of a unified India, with bloodshed between them instead of peace and progress, had been a bitter blow for Nehru and the strain showed in his face. There was always a spiritual quality about Pandit Nehru's finely modelled face, and it seemed to me that suffering had increased that expression. Now that his aquiline features had grown thinner his eyes seemed all the more profound and glowing in their deepened setting.



Pandit Nehru (the Indian word ‘Pandit’ means ‘learned man’ —‘pundit’) had just the words I needed to explain the efficacy of a Gandhi fast.

‘Voluntary suffering has great effect on the Indian mind.’ Nehru emphasized the word ‘voluntary’. ‘Gandhi is a kind of sentinel who stands apart. He has felt great distress at the barriers growing up in India. He felt he must take this final step to direct people’s minds, to divert them from wrong paths. The fast does two things. It introduces a sense of urgency to the problem and forces people to think out of the ruts—to think afresh. It produces a favourable psychological atmosphere. Then it is up to others to take advantage of this atmosphere.’

‘Will it really stop the bloodshed?’ I asked. ‘There is so much bitterness.’

‘Those who are most bitter are not likely to be affected,’ said Nehru. ‘But it is like working to swing an election. It is the large middle lot who are affected.’

Then Nehru confirmed what I had guessed, that even those government leaders closest to Gandhi had not been informed in advance. ‘He did it entirely on his own. I saw him just this afternoon. He was silent. He did not tell me. For a long time he has been deeply worried as to what he should do. And now, as is usual with him when he has made his decision, he feels greatly relieved.’

‘If you had known in advance, would you have tried to stop him?’

‘One’s normal reaction is to try to stop him. He functions in ways which are not entirely normal.’

It was late at night when I left Prime Minister Nehru, but I was not due on the air until almost midnight, and there was still one more person whom I wanted to see. This was a woman who had been with Gandhi even longer than most of the others in that tight little group around him. If I was to show Gandhi as a human being, instead of the remote, incomprehensible figure he seemed to the West, I had to learn how those closest to him felt about his throwing his life into the balance as he had done. So I drove to the house of Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, the Minister of Health.

Raj Kumari is a Christian and, but for a twist of fate, might have lived as a princess, for she is the great-granddaughter of the



late Maharajah of Kapurthala. But, when she was still very young, her father left his native state of Kapurthala and went to Lahore. His home became a gathering place for rebels, of whom Gandhi was one, and it was during one of these meetings that Raj Kumari peeped through the door and first saw Gandhi. One of her friends told me that she had declared that this first meeting made 'almost a slave of her'. This young Christian girl was inspired by such confidence, such trust in the Hindu leader 'who preached one religion and that is truth' that she begged her parents' consent to go and be with Gandhi in his ashram, his camp of followers who lived a somewhat nomadic existence travelling and working throughout India. For nearly thirty years Raj Kumari devoted much of her time to Gandhi, and on Independence Day she was given the portfolio of Minister of Health in the new government of India.

The house lights were on when I arrived at Raj Kumari's home, and I found the Honourable Minister seated on the floor, sorting through her correspondence. In the midst of the drifts of papers, she was a dark little figure in a dull black sari, with her black hair in long straight loops over her ears. To my brief questions on how she felt about Gandhi's decision to fast, she raised a deeply moving look tortured with worry.

'I cannot begrudge him his peace,' said Raj Kumari, an expression of anything but peace on her own face.

She knew how he had suffered. Such bloodshed, such wrath had swept the country. Therefore, the fast came as no surprise, and Raj Kumari began repeating, 'It came as no surprise' over and over in an almost mechanical way, then broke off to say bitterly, 'It was such an unnatural division of India!'

When she heard of the prayer announcement, she hurried to 'Gandhiji' (the diminutive 'ji' added to a name is a term of affection and respect). She had found him with 'such a look of peace on his face'. She raised her tortured, unquiet eyes to me once more. 'This is the first look of peace I have seen in many months.'

'You feel he will be able to stand the strain of the fast?' I asked.

'Even if he dies'—Raj Kumari's voice was almost inaudible—'what does death matter? We should not even attempt to dissuade him. He has to make his own decisions. He is a man of God.'



## Chapter IV

### GANDHI'S LAST FAST

THE next morning I went to Birla House on Albuquerque Road in New Delhi, where Gandhi was living, and found him eating his last meal before the fast. He took two hours to eat that breakfast. Not that he ate any more than usual, but he consumed each vegetarian mouthful slowly and with much care. As I stood at the edge of the lawn and watched him sitting cross-legged on his cot in the middle of the garden, I wondered whether the distinguished visitor with him might not be trying to talk this man of God out of his decision to fast.

I could see only the back of this prominent caller from where I stood, but even from the back Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was unmistakable, with his robe draped like a toga and the sun beating down on the huge polished head which made him look like the statue of a Roman senator. Although Vallabhbhai Patel was only the Deputy to Prime Minister Nehru, many people considered him more influential than Nehru, and some went so far as to say that Patel was the most powerful man in India. And since last night's dramatic announcement, people were saying that Patel was the man who could be most embarrassed by Gandhi's undertaking of this fast.

The two sat together in the garden, Gandhi on his cot, and Patel leaning forward in his green wicker chair, his flexible fingers extended in sweeping gestures as he talked. There was only a few years' difference in their ages; Patel had been Gandhi's chief lieutenant in the long fight for independence and had been imprisoned many times with Gandhi. His name 'Patel' means 'village leader', and the designation of Sardar—given him when he led the Non-Payment of Tax Campaign at Bardoli in the mid-twenties—means 'great leader'. While the two men talked, a small procession of breakfast trays kept leaving the kitchen for the garden and passing under my nose, so I had a chance to see each detail of Gandhiji's last breakfast. Observing orthodox Hindu



dietary law, Gandhi ate no meat, and he carried the Hindu reverence for the cow so far that he abstained from cow's milk and drank only goat's milk. There were goat curds mixed in with Gandhi's boiled spinach this morning, as well as periodic servings of a chopped apple and orange mixture.

The garden of Birla House, with the white linen and silver on Gandhi's breakfast table forming a bright central highlight, was particularly beautiful that January morning. The prim brick edges of the formal flower beds could scarcely hold back the golden profusion of marigolds and nasturtiums, then in their mid-winter prime. A trumpet vine blazing with bell-shaped flower clusters ran riot over a trellis backing Gandhi's breakfast table, and not far from his cot a petunia-bordered brook dropped soundlessly away through descending pools of ornamental brickwork. During my stay in India I never ceased to wonder why Gandhi, who symbolized the simple life for millions, should live at the home of India's richest textile magnate. I wondered if I would ever have the opportunity and the courage to ask Gandhi himself how he reconciled this with his beliefs.

To the man in the street, Seth Birla was the personification of big business, and Patel was its spokesman. In the popular mind Patel was associated with rightist and Nehru with leftist trends; Patel with the industrialists and the maharajahs, and Nehru with the rights of the common man. A conflict between Nehru and Patel seemed always on the verge of bubbling to the surface, but never quite broke.

Patel was in charge of home affairs, the princely states, and information and broadcasting. The cabinet was about equally divided between 'Patel men' and 'Nehru men'. If it should ever come to an open test of strength an important factor would be that Patel, a politician to his eloquent finger-tips, had over the years built up a smoothly functioning political machine, which the more visionary Jawaharlal Nehru, despite his very real popularity and loyal following, had neglected to do. Gandhi's significant announcement of the night before had revived the backstage gossip that differences between the Prime Minister and his Deputy were about to split the government in two; the whole religious minority problem was loaded with dynamite—



underlined as it was by Gandhi's decision to fast until it was solved.

I stood out of earshot as Gandhi slowly, deliberately, ate his way through his last breakfast, but Patel's increasingly dramatic gestures made it safe to guess that the Sardar was pointing out the difficult position into which the government would be put by Gandhi's fast. Only a week earlier Patel had stated that many Muslims 'could not be trusted'. In a speech in Lucknow he had given public encouragement to a hitherto *sub rosa*, fanatically Hindu youth movement known by its initials as the R.S.S.

The young recruits of the Rashtriya Sevak Sangh (National Service Society) were mainly office clerks or came from tradesmen's families, and their declared aims were innocent enough: to promote physical culture. On almost any vacant lot groups of them could be seen in the mornings, where they met for setting-up exercises, and where each one received a glass of milk—a strong attraction for this low-income group. Who paid for all these glasses of milk was never made public, although it was rumoured that certain big industrialists and some of the maharajahs were the benefactors. The R.S.S. insisted it was a non-political body; however, there was no doubt that its young men absorbed with their glasses of milk strong doses of what they called 'awakening race spirit'. I had managed to get my hands on some of their secret literature, and each blazing line about Hindu supremacy reminded me of ideas I had heard in Germany during the 'thirties when rising fascism fed its master-race theory to the Hitler youth. With the R.S.S. stand against 'wrong notions of democracy' and their belief that Muslims should be treated as foreigners 'wholly subordinate to the Hindu nation', there seemed a very real danger that this youth movement might develop the same fascist and totalitarian tendencies we had witnessed in the West, and act against minorities as the Nazis did against the Jews.

The R.S.S. was an offshoot of the larger Hindu Mahasabha, an organization which guarded religious tradition and caste customs and advocated a return to the pure Hinduism of two thousand years ago. This orthodox body had a heavy stake in religious rioting; therefore Patel, in his Lucknow speech, had caused a sensation by suggesting that the Congress include representation of



this militant Mahasabha, so rigorously opposed to giving Muslims any place in national life.

Nehru, on the other hand, vigorously championed the treatment of all citizens as equals regardless of their religion. During recent riots he had been spectacular in his defence of Muslims. A high-caste Hindu himself, Nehru had earned the respect of people of all religions by the fierce courage he had shown, even to the point of jumping out of his car and beating back with his bare hands Hindus who were looting Muslim shops and murdering Muslim shopkeepers.

Whatever aspect of the Muslim minority problem Patel and Gandhi may have been thrashing out in the garden, the theatrical effect of the pantomime was accentuated by the arrival of small reverent groups, many of them Muslim women in their bright-coloured trousers, who took up positions in the portico and formed a silent spectators' gallery. A high point in the Sardar's eloquence seemed to have arrived: he raised his long forefinger straight to the heavens as though calling down some prophecy of doom to come, got up abruptly from the green wicker chair, and left the garden.

The time for the formal commencement of the fast had come. The small group of men and women who had been gathering to witness this moment, which by now included the wife of Nehru's nephew and the daughter of Patel, moved up close to Gandhi's cot. I stood within arm's length of Gandhi while he took his last mouthful of boiled greens and his last sip of goat's milk. He set on the cot in front of him his famous five-shilling watch—the new one which the manufacturers had given him after the old one had been stolen, presumably by a souvenir hunter. Then some of his women followers began to cry, knowing what it meant for this man in his seventy-ninth year to start on a fast. Gandhi turned to them and spoke in words so low that only those closest to him could hear. 'What do you expect me to do?' he said. 'Because the whole world has gone mad shall I go mad also? No, I shall go mad only for God.' The hands of his watch pointed to eleven; the fast had begun.

It was symbolic of the religious unity for which Gandhi was fasting that he should open his fast with prayers, and that those



prayers should represent three great religions. First the group recited from the Koran, then Gandhi's women followers sang a Christian hymn. Sushila had chosen Gandhi's favourite among hymns; the words seemed almost prophetic: 'When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died.' Then there were verses from the Bhagavad-Gita (which means, literally, 'Song of God'). The selections came from Lord Krishna's discourse to Arjuna on the eve of battle, and the lines dealt with one's duty toward God and mankind. Last, there was a chant from the Ramdhun in praise of the Hindu God Rama, but here a stanza of Gandhi's own composition was added. It has special appropriateness, implying essential brotherhood between Hindus and Muslims, whose God was one and the same, the God of all. In it Gandhi called on Ishvara (one of the more humanized manifestations of the Hindu God), and on the Muslims' Allah. The verses ended:

Ishvara and Allah are their names;  
Show thy mercy to all, O Lord.

In the evening we returned again for prayers. There was always a kind of homeliness about Gandhi's evening prayer meeting, which the formal setting of Mr Birla's impressively landscaped garden could not erase. People arrived in neighbourly little groups and sat down quietly on the ground. But they were more subdued than usual this evening, and spoke only in lowered voices. A baby who cried was promptly quietened. Everyone was waiting anxiously to see whether Gandhi would come.

The clear January sun was sending its last glowing shafts across the handsome lawn when Gandhi came, his long brown legs stepping steadily along the garden path, his wiry arms resting on the shoulders of two small children. As he took his place on the square mattress under the ornamental archwork of the garden pavilion, his women followers grouped themselves cross-legged around him, faced the microphone—all of Gandhi's microphones, I noted, had the large, incongruous label 'Chicago'—and began their evening chant.

'Mahatma certainly surrounds himself with bad singers,' said Chari in a low voice. Chari was the correspondent for the *People's Age* and was an accomplished vocalist.



An expectant stillness came over them as the prayers drew to an end, closing as they always did with Gandhi and the women beating their hands in rhythm to the final bars of the Gita. The people in the garden waited in silence for Gandhi to speak.

He began with an apology. He would talk a little longer than usual this evening. Usually he felt six or eight minutes was long enough for people to have to listen to him, but 'From to-morrow on,' he explained, 'I am not sure I will be able to come to you. At least one girl will come. The prayers will go on.'

Then he began talking very simply about his reasons for the fast. He spoke in Hindustani, but since his words came slowly one of my Indian friends was able to whisper a running translation to me as he spoke.

'Hindus and Sikhs and Muslims must live as brothers here. Unless we examine the whole situation and search our hearts and stop these things that have been happening, there is no hope for us. Hindus and Sikhs must see that there is no retaliation, whatever Muslims elsewhere may do. Some say I am fasting only for Muslims. That is true only in part. I fast to purify myself.'

This is really it, I thought. He had himself on trial. He had a religious position of his own to defend: his belief in the brotherhood of man, which is just as essential to Hinduism as it is to Christianity. His whole philosophy of non-violence is at stake. He could not accept this chaos which had swept India. He could not survive another Calcutta carnage, another Punjab.

It was plain that Gandhi was launching the hardest battle of his life: the battle to conquer inner hatreds. For thirty years he had fought an outside power and with his weapon of non-violence had been spectacularly successful in leading his people along the road to freedom. Now he was faced with a still more difficult job: the task of winning tolerance and unity within men's hearts. As he talked on in his quiet voice I had the feeling that he possessed a real power to call on these people's inner strength, for, I thought, he is closer to the soul of India than any other man.

In the audience of six hundred every ear was strained as the Mahatma went on: 'Hindus and Sikhs must be very brave here in the Indian Union. They must reach such heights of courage that



even if every Hindu and Sikh gets killed in Pakistan, they must see that not a single Muslim is harmed here. If a Muslim is killed here, then it is cowardice, not courage.

'My fast imposes a heavy responsibility on the Muslims. They too must live as brothers in the Indian Union, and they must be loyal to the government. This must show in their actions.' At this point he plunged so abruptly into a subject which had been discussed only in whispers that those of us who had been probing the rumours of a government split were startled. 'Some say that Nehru and Gandhi are all right, but that Sardar Patel is bad. I must tell them that this distinction is a bad one. If Sardar makes mistakes we must point them out, but not say, "Sardar is a bad man." Sardar has said, "I cannot trust all Muslims. I cannot trust the League Muslims who were our enemies till yesterday, and say they are our friends now." A brother has a right to express his doubts. But I always tell him, "Your tongue has thorns in it." Sardar and Jawaharlal run the government together; Sardar is a representative of the people, which means also of Muslims.'

He is serving notice on Patel, I thought, reminding him of his duty, in a democratic state, to all constituents. But this is even more than an effort to bring Nehru and Patel closer together. It involves Gandhiji too. These men have always been a kind of trinity. For thirty years they have worked together for freedom: Gandhi with the spirit of the prophet in him, appointed to show the path; Nehru the idealist, named by Gandhi as his political heir; Patel with the politician's velvet finger-tips and the tongue of thorns.

'How long will I fast? Until I am satisfied that the people of all religions in India mix like brothers and move without fear. Otherwise my fast can never end.'

I believe everyone in the garden had a feeling that greatness hovered over that frail little figure, talking so earnestly in the deepening twilight. He was pitting all the physical strength he had left in his thin, wiry body against the spirit of hate consuming his country. 'But I am not alone,' were his closing words, 'because although there is darkness on the way, God is with me.'

Sushila and little Abbha, his grandniece-in-law, helped him to his feet. The crowd parted silently to open up a path; the lean,



brown figure in the loincloth disappeared toward the house, and we wondered whether we would ever see Gandhiji again.

‘Certainly he has spiritual powers,’ a little post-office clerk whom I had recognized in the crowd, whispered to me as we walked toward the street. ‘He is like God. He has accomplished many miracles, but if he accomplishes this it will be the greatest miracle of his life.’



## Chapter V

### PROMISE OF PEACE

JUST how great a miracle the Mahatma had set himself to accomplish became clearer to me the next morning when I stepped into a taxicab. The driver was a Sikh who wore his beard in a neat, tight chin roll which reached as high as his ears and was tucked in with tiny hairpins. I had noticed him when I entered the cab because of the odd lack of harmony between his belligerent eyes and his dainty headgear: a masterfully twisted turban, coil on coil of delicate muslin sprinkled with tiny violets and rosebuds. When I found he spoke a little English I questioned him, as I was questioning everybody, about his attitude toward Gandhi's fast.

'Let the Old Man fast. Let him die!' The voice from under the tower of muslin was unexpectedly bitter. 'Let them both die. Gandhi and Jinnah. Jinnah decided on partition. It brought suffering to Sikhs, and yet Gandhi directs his fast at us. Let both the old men die. They are the cause of all our misery.'

Gandhi's prohibition against using Muslim tombs and mosques for Sikh and Hindu refugees had enraged my taxi driver. He had, I found, a relatives-in-law problem that would have driven even a milder man to desperation. His wife's entire family had fled from Pakistan to take refuge in Delhi, and he had just succeeded in installing them comfortably in the tomb of a Muslim saint when Gandhiji started his drive to get the refugees out of all sacred Mohammedan places so the Muslim minority could go freely to worship. As a result, the driver's tiny flat was overflowing with uncles- and aunts-in-law, a mother-in-law, and numerous first cousins, while the still more numerous second cousins were out in an open lot.

As we turned into Albuquerque Road and reached Birla House, I found a group milling around the gate shouting an astonishing slogan—it was the first time I had ever heard it—'*Gandhi murdabad!*' ('Death to Gandhi!')

I walked up to some Sikhs and Hindus who looked a little



calmer than the rest and began questioning them, and as always happens with an Indian crowd, I was quickly surrounded by a knot of people who spoke some English and were eager to impart their views. A young Hindu spoke up: 'Sardarji himself says you can never trust a Muslim. He made that announcement only last week in Lucknow.' The young man wore an orange armband with a black swastika; no matter how often I saw this emblem of the Hindu Mahasabha it always startled me by its closeness to the badge of Nazism.

'Why can't the government announce a housing scheme!' This came from an elderly Hindu refugee who told me he had been a wholesale fruit dealer till his home city of Rawalpindi became part of Pakistan. 'Let the government build forty thousand houses in Delhi. Such a scheme would solve the problems of riots more effectively than a fast.'

'Let them turn over the maharajahs' palaces—just the empty ones that are lying idle in New Delhi,' said a tall Hindu who, I found, had been secretary of the Electrical Workers' Union in Lahore. This was such a sensible suggestion that I wondered why it had not been broached before. What a thrilling example it would be, I thought, of the Gandhian philosophy in practice—what a striking demonstration of his view that princes and capitalists with all their wealth should practice 'trusteeship' over the people. But India is far from being a fairyland where princes turn over their palaces to destitutes.

While I was in the midst of these people Mr Birla's front door opened and out walked Nehru, Patel, and Maulana Azad, the scholarly Muslim who was India's Minister of Education, evidently coming from a conference with Gandhi. Each of the three hurried into his respective car, Nehru—it happened—last. The first two cars had swung into the road, and Nehru's was just turning through the gate when the crowd took up its medley of chants again, some people shouting, 'Long live the Sardar. *Sardar Patel zindabad*,' and others yelling the incredible '*Gandhi murdabad!*' As the slogan reached Nehru's ears he jumped out, pale with rage. 'How can you say such a thing!' he shouted. 'Kill me first.' The crowd fell silent and began melting away.

The crowd that gathered in the garden at prayer time that eve-



ning was not notably large, but the people who came for prayers were deeply reverent in their attitude toward Gandhi and greatly concerned as to whether his health would stand the strain. I caught sight of an Indian friend and made my way to him through the crowd. Bedi was a giant of a figure in his billowing wool homespun which swept in coarse, oatmeal-coloured folds from his massive shoulders to his Gargantuan feet, bare and crusty in their open sandals. Bedi was an Oxford graduate, an author of some note, and a direct descendant of the First Guru, the holy Teacher Nanak, who founded the Sikh religion. Even with this priestly blood flowing through his veins there was nothing of the religious fanatic about Bedi; in spite of his archaic garments he was one of the most progressive and cultivated—and great-hearted—of men.

I said I was surprised that Gandhi's fast was not drawing bigger crowds. 'It is too soon to judge,' said Bedi, speaking from his experience with several of Gandhi's past fasts. 'After two more days we'll know better, when anxiety increases for Gandhiji's life. A mass psychology is created as his fasts go on.'

That evening's prayer group was sprinkled through with uniforms. Some soldiers of the Indian Army had come down on leave from the Kashmir front, where they had been fighting the fierce Mohammedan tribesmen who had swept in from Pakistan, burning villages, terrorizing villagers, kidnapping women, and looting from Muslim and Hindu peasants alike. With winter snows piling up in the mountain passes, the action had dwindled to guerrilla warfare, giving these soldiers brief leave from the front.

Bedi, who had also come from Kashmir and had been active with the people's movement, translated for me as I talked with the soldiers.

'Gandhiji has no right to risk his life like this,' said a young man wearing an artillery shoulder patch. 'He must eat and be strong.'

'We too must eat and be strong,' said an army wireless operator. 'If he goes on a fast how can we fight? Because then we too will fast and Kashmir will be over-run.'

'In India we must protect the Muslims.' The artillery man



sounded puzzled. 'How is this principle to be applied in a place like Kashmir where fighting is going on?'

This was a question that I should have liked to discuss further, but at that moment a group of Gandhi's women followers walked toward the prayer platform, and we all waited expectantly for one of them to start the prayers. But apparently they were waiting also, and then, to our surprise, Gandhi himself came, leaning heavily on the shoulders of Abbha and another grandniece.

He seemed considerably weaker; his voice, when it came through the microphone, was faint and sometimes faded out altogether. Then, in addition, he had microphone trouble; the loud-speaker with its Chicago label served him badly that night, and electricians tinkered with it as his sentences dwindled into mechanical raspings. But imperfectly as we heard him, it was plain that where last night's speech had been focussed on conditions inside the Indian Union, this evening his message was pointed toward Pakistan. He referred to a recent massacre of Sikhs in Karachi, the capital of Pakistan, and to an attack on a refugee train in the Gujrat railway station from which large numbers of Hindu women were abducted. 'Pakistan has to put a stop to this state of affairs,' he said. 'Pakistan must become *pak* [pure]. I want to live to see that "Land of the Pure" not on paper but in the daily life of every Pakistani Muslim. Then the Indian Union will proudly copy Pakistan, and if I am alive I shall ask her to excel Pakistan in well-doing. The fast is a bid for nothing less.' The microphone began screeching at this point. When the electricians finally got the loud-speaker back on an even keel, Gandhi was saying, '. . . then, in the evening of my life, I shall jump like a child, to feel that the dream has been realized in this life. Who would not risk sacrificing his life for realization of such a dream? Then we shall have real freedom in India.'

The next evening a much larger crowd gathered for prayers, but Gandhi did not come. Sushila led the prayers this time, and when they were over a remarkable thing happened. People began asking for Gandhi's darshan. 'Darshan' is a word you hear often in India. If you are in the presence of an important personage you are getting his darshan. So as the clamour rose for a sight of Gandhi, the people were told they might line up by twos, women



first, and file through the garden to the back of Birla House. I dropped into line with the women and we passed through the long walk with its rich clusters of columbine heavy and dark in the gathering twilight, and all at once we were out in the open area of formal rose beds that surrounded the sun porch. The glass doors of the porch were open. Gandhi's cot had been set between them, and on it lay the little old man, as if sound asleep.

I find it hard to describe my feelings at seeing the frail little figure lying there, with the silent, reverent people filing by. It would be impossible to imagine such a thing in Europe or America—a prominent person asleep, and yet on exhibition to his public. There is an extraordinary combination of extreme personal intimacy and public display in the attitude of Indians toward their leaders. I have never seen it in any other country.

From then on the public began taking a hand in the fast. Every day, every hour, saw an increase in processions, in the formation of Peace Brigades, in the massing together of gigantic open-air meetings. Convoys of trucks toured the streets with banners, reading: 'Mahatmaji's life is more precious than ours!' Students and their professors streamed from the universities chanting, 'We will die before Mahatma dies!' Two hundred destitute women and children, widowed and orphaned by riots, fasted in sympathy (their pitiful rations had left them close to fasting already) and then trudged to Birla House to assure Gandhiji that they 'would not indulge in retaliation' and would have only 'sympathy toward those Muslim widows and orphans who have suffered a similar fate'. Various maharajahs rolled through Birla's gates in their Rolls-Royces to request the Mahatma to break his fast. The Bombay untouchables sent a telegram of appeal saying: 'Your life belongs to us.'

Through it all Sushila drew up a little bulletin each day which was typed and posted on the outside wall of the gatehouse giving a detailed account of how the Mahatma had slept and how well or badly his kidneys had functioned. And through it all Gandhiji greeted each report of increased communal harmony with 'Don't deceive me to try to make me go off my fast. If you do that, you will do me a great injury. I will suffer and India will suffer.'

There was one very moving evening which I shall never forget.



The fifth day of the fast was drawing to an end, and the size of the procession was growing enormous. There had been a mammoth meeting at Urdu Park which had packed all the wide meadows stretching between the historic Red Fort and the bubble-shaped dome clusters of the Jamma Mosque, and five thousand cyclists and five thousand pilgrims on foot had swarmed down on Birla House from that meeting alone. After them came the processions of the Railway Workers Union, the Post and Telegraph Workers, the Government Press Workers Union, the Military Accounts clerks, the Delhi Woman's League. It was a thrilling sight, procession after procession with their many-coloured banners pouring through the Birla gates, overflowing the lawn, the flower beds, the broad marble terraces.

Darkness came, but the blazing squares of the Birla windows threw out enough light to pick out some details in that surging sea of heads. And still the processions came, squeezing in through the gates, shouting promises of religious unity, pledging their lives to save the life of the Mahatma.

At a high point in the slogan shouting, Dr Jivraj Mehta, one of the two consulting physicians called in during the fast, came out on the portico and began scolding the demonstrators, waving his plump palms and shouting, 'Have you come to see a carnival?'

But in the next moment Pandit Nehru arrived. Sensing the temper of the crowd, and knowing that this was just what Gandhiji had been working for and waiting for, he climbed to the top of a cement pillar by the drive and spoke a few words. I couldn't hear what he said, but the word ran around the crowd: 'Panditji is going to address us at the prayer place,' and the people began streaming toward the back of the garden. I wanted a good translator when I listened to Nehru, because Nehru, an artist in his use of both Hindustani and English, was sure to speak to this crowd in their native tongue. Looking around for someone I knew, I spotted Bedi and Chari. Bedi was always easy to pick out—he towered above any crowd—and under the protection of this man-mountain I managed to get to the foot of the garden pavilion. Pandit Nehru had mounted the little prayer platform and was speaking into the microphone, requesting people to sit down and be as quiet as possible so as not to disturb the Mahatma. Bedi took



the great oatmeal blanket off his shoulders, spread it on the ground, and we sat down on it as Panditji began his impromptu talk to his people.

'I saw the freedom of India as a vision. I had charted the future of Asia on my heart.' Bedi whispered his translation, as Nehru spoke of their high aspirations, how they had reached out toward them even as a slave nation. 'We felt that India would be a great free country in this disturbed world. It was the aspiration of our youth. It was our pride. In the final analysis, countries do not attain freedom only on maps. The sentiment of freedom surges from the hearts.'

As Nehru talked, I found his words were helping me to read a deeper meaning into the long fight for independence 'on the map' and for progress and extended freedom as well. 'No outside power could free India,' Nehru was saying. After having talked with hundreds of people during my nearly two years' stay in India I had no doubt that it was a mistaken notion to think of independence as a voluntary offering from the British Commonwealth to the Indians. Each concession, each gain toward self-government, had come only after struggle and sacrifice. From the mass movements following the first World War, through the countless arrests and soul-wasting years in prison (in which Nehru had so fully shared), each rung in the ladder had been hammered into place, until the revolt within the ranks of the Royal Indian Navy spectacularly heralded the finish of the fight. With Britain's own armed forces in India streaming off their ships to join hands with the people in the streets in the clamour for freedom, it was plain that there was no longer any choice except withdrawal for the British Raj. But however equitably and gracefully the British might have withdrawn, the divide-and-rule policy was left as a heritage; now self-rule had come but division remained. And because the bitterness must be somehow cleaned away before India could realize the fruits of freedom, a beloved old man, growing weaker by the hour, was making his last and greatest fight for unity.

'Thirty years ago Gandhiji arrived on the scene,' Nehru was saying. 'An odd-looking man. No art of dressing and no polish in his ways of speech. He did not indulge in high politics. He only



said, "Follow truth. If our goal is good, the path to it should also be righteous. If we want to be free, we must free each other first. Only a free people can lay the foundations of a free land." These were the lessons of Gandhiji. He had warned us, if we swerve from the path of righteous behaviour, we shall be ruined.'

Nehru's slight figure had dwindled to a mere blur, as his voice came out of the darkness. And then something very beautiful happened in the garden. Someone who had just pushed his way in with his bicycle shone the lamp on the handlebars across the heads of the seated people toward Nehru. Then more and more cyclists turned their lamps on him, until the whole garden seemed to be flickering with fireflies. When someone with a lamp squeezed his way in near us, Bedi took my notebook and began writing in its light, taking down Nehru's words in swift, hook-shaped Urdu characters, dashing off English phrases for me between his lines of Indian script.

'I am not a religious man,' Bedi translated Nehru's words, 'but I do believe at moments that we pay for our past deeds. It is those acts which determine our future. I believe, be it a nation or a country, it cannot escape the fruits of what it sows in the fields of its deeds.' (I shall always treasure this notebook for those beautiful words, inscribed in decorative characters.) 'We are surrounded by sorrow, even though we achieved freedom. Again and again thoughts come to my mind. What ill deeds are we paying for?'

Jawaharlal Nehru had cherished a plan in the past for an Asian federation, following the spiritual leadership of India, and I was greatly interested that he referred to it here in his impromptu garden talk. He spoke of his dream of the new India—its place in Asia—and through Asia of our role in the world. These visions of mine have not been effaced, even to-day. Only sometimes fear grips my mind whether, in the short span of life left in front of us, we have time enough to realize our dreams in reality.

'It is a sustaining thought in moments of heartbreaking despair that after all there is something great and vital in the soil of our country which can produce a Gandhi, a personality of his character, even though a Gandhi may be born only after a thousand years. Let us take the cue to our actions from the guidance which



he gives with over seventy years of wisdom behind him. He will lead us to the true goal and not to the false dawn of our hopes.'

I had a dinner engagement with Nehru that evening, it happened, and when he finished his speech I hurried to leave. It was a considerable job to beat my way through all the people and bicycles, and when I reached the gate I found a tussle in the street blocking my way. A delegation of Sikhs had tried to push their way into the meeting and, finding there was no room for them, had begun yelling. 'There are no places for us here. There is no room for us in India, and yet they are making pets of Muslims.' The police, who were always rather light-fingered with their lathees, had begun striking out in all directions.

In the midst of this fracas, suddenly I saw Nehru beside me. In the next minute he surprised me by climbing to the top of the concrete gatepost, where he balanced himself quite easily. (Nehru at fifty-nine, still stood on his head every morning as part of his exercises.) He began addressing the disgruntled crowd with great good humour. 'You got a few sticks on your backs, but look at all the Mahatma has been through.'

His good nature was infectious, and I was intrigued to see how his manner had changed with this audience. A few minutes before in the garden he had been grave, reflective, speaking to the silent, sympathetic crowd like a man voicing his thoughts aloud. Here, all at once, he was so good-humoured and open-hearted that he captured even this disorderly mob. 'A few sticks,' he repeated, almost laughing with them, 'and all through misunderstanding. You have gone to all this trouble—taken two hours to walk here. And the Mahatma has gone to so much trouble . . .'

I left Nehru on his gatepost and joined him at his house later over a supper that could hardly have been simpler. All I can remember is a big dish of boiled macaroni and my embarrassment at having changed to evening dress for what turned out to be a simple and very informal dinner. When we rose from the table after finishing the macaroni Nehru said, 'And now I begin my fast. All Delhi will be fasting to-morrow.'

I was just taking my leave when a very worried Congress Party official came in. He had just come from Birla House, where he had learned Gandhiji's weight. Because of faulty elimination, the



Mahatma had gained half a pound during the day's fast, an extremely dangerous sign. 'Another twenty-four hours,' he said, 'and it may be too late.'

Early the next morning I went to Birla House and waited all morning outside the door with the anxious crowd. It was a few minutes past noon when a happy cry of women's voices sounded from inside the house. I picked up my camera and ran inside, and in a moment I was with Sushila and the grandnieces and a tight-packed group of men and women in Gandhi's room, and everybody was laughing and crying for joy. Gandhiji was going to break his fast. A peace programme had been drawn up and signed in his presence by an astonishing range of Sikh and Hindu leaders representing shades of religious opinion that had never approached agreement before. The delegates fanned from the moderates to the fanatics. At the extremist end of the scale, the signers included that militant champion of Hindu supremacy, the Hindu Mahasabha and its Sikh counterpart, the equally militant and orthodox Akali Shahidi Jatha. The seldom-seen and almost mythical president of the R.S.S. had come in person that morning to affix his signature. Either Gandhiji has truly worked a miracle, I thought when I heard this, or the Youth Movement leader has his tongue in his cheek. A phrase of the secret R.S.S. creed was still fresh in my mind: 'to abolish Islam root and branch'.

The High Commissioner of Pakistan had also come in person, and from Pakistan as well as India Gandhi had received what his happy followers referred to as 'a spate of telegrams'. These telegrams overflowed the desk, the tables, and the window sills, and Gandhiji, where he lay smiling on his mattress in a corner of the floor, was clutching a telegram in his long, thin hand.

I jumped on the desk and got my camera into action. Pretty little Abbha burst in with a tall glass of fruit juice, knelt beside Gandhi, and he kissed her. But before he would take even a sip of orange juice he asked for a microphone. A general to his people, as always, he announced his decision to the waiting crowds outside in a faint voice hoarse with exhaustion. Only then did he accept the fruit juice, which the Muslim Cabinet Minister Maulana Azad and Pandit Nehru made a little ceremony of handing him alternately.



Then the women followers flocked in carrying trays of orange slices which Gandhi blessed. This was *prasad*, God's gift. The women passed the fruit platters to the crowd, and people, sobbing with happiness, eagerly reached for the orange slices, sharing them with one another and even passing bits of orange up to me where I stood taking pictures on the tabletop, so that a foreigner, too, could share in God's gift.

The whole nation seemed to have shared God's gift, Gandhiji's fast had stirred up a fount of emotion and great soul-searching. Although sporadic outbreaks continued to occur, especially in explosive border areas or where the greatest refugee concentrations showed only too bitterly that problems remained unsolved, Gandhiji's heroic risking of his life had wrought profound effects. The entire country had been stirred to its foundations, and the people bent their will toward peace.

The learned Hindu commentators went back to the ancient Upanishads and found increased meaning in the lines that allotted one hundred and twenty-five years to the Mahatma. This life span, they pointed out, was only the minimum. Their interpretations reflected such auspiciousness that the Mahatma could look forward to reaching an age of one hundred and thirty-three years. . . .

But the militant youths of the R.S.S., its numbers swelled by young refugees who could find no constructive outlets in their uprooted lives, continued to meet for their morning milk and exercises and continued to warm their adolescent imaginations over the glories of the pure Hinduism of two thousand years ago.



## Chapter VI

### THE MILL WORKERS OF DELHI

THROUGHOUT Gandhi's fast and during his entire crusade for religious unity one group gave him consistent support, although its members had disagreed with certain of the Mahatma's views on other matters. That group was Labour.

During the most brutal waves of the religious wars the labour unions stood out with great effectiveness against the hysteria; they were often the last groups in a community to become infected with Hindu-Muslim hatreds. This is not surprising. Labour has had considerable spadework to do in India, where feudalism still strongly taints employer-employee relationships. Too often, Indian labour had seen how efficiently a religious riot could be used to break up a strike or weaken a union.

So it followed that among the hordes of peace demonstrators that swept through the Birla gates during the fast, some of the largest processions were of labour unions. The bus and tramcar operators, the locomotive maintenance men, the typesetters, the government accountants, all marched in parades flowering with banners. All the trade-unions sent delegations with peace pledges and with appeals to save Gandhiji's life. All except one—and the missing one was the largest of all—the union of textile workers. The leading industry of Delhi—in fact, of India as a whole—is textiles; and India's leading textile mill owner is Mr Birla. During the week of the fast a few individual weavers and spinners came to Birla House with the more informal groups, but no organized procession representing this largest union passed through the Birla gates during the fast.

Curious about this singular omission, when the feverishly crowded days of the fast were over I went out to the mill district, which lies on the far reaches of Old Delhi. Delhi is a great sprawling city—actually it is a composite of eight cities, seven old and one new. Its dazzlingly modern government buildings and colonnaded apartment hotels and white-domed princes' palaces fade out



as one reaches the tortuous streets and crowded quarters of the factory district.

The enormous Birla mills lie out in the Sabzi Mandi, the market area where tramcars, buses, bullock carts, and horse-drawn tongas jostle each other through twisted and almost impassable streets. Once within the honeycomb of workers' quarters which chokes every space between factories, shops, and food stalls, I got out of my taxi and trusted to my usual luck in finding someone who spoke English. I poked my way at random through a narrow twisting alley-way and all at once found myself in a kind of walled-in residential square, with perhaps fifty or sixty slatted openings leading into cell-like rooms, known as 'bustees', lining the inside of the wall. In the mathematical centre of the area was a pump, and several dozen men and a few women and children were standing or sitting about on the earth-baked central court.

I had no sooner stepped inside this enclosure than I was surrounded by inquisitive people; we looked at each other with equal curiosity, and it struck me that these were the same sort of people, with agile, too-slender bodies, heavily veined, skilful hands, and anxious, eager faces which one sees in any mill town in the world. Except for the typical Hindu dhoties of the men and saris of the women, and the darker skins which concealed the usual mill pallor, I might have been in any one of the dozens of manufacturing towns that I have photographed in Europe.

The barrier between the mill people and myself was easily bridged, once they got over their astonishment. 'No one ever comes to see us,' said a wiry little man with jerky birdlike movements, whose job, I found, was to set the coloured threads of a row of looms for sari borders—white cotton sari lengths with narrow red or blue woven borders were the chief product of one of the near-by Birla mills. His name was Ram Das, and he had picked up some English as a small boy when he was a servant for an English family. Soon the conversation was going strong, with Ram Das translating into competent although rather stilted phrases, his forehead puckered with the effort, and his head cocked on one side.

I did not have to question them on the subject which had brought me there, for Gandhi's recent fast was on everyone's lips. The in-



stant his name entered the conversation, comments poured from the crowd faster than Ram Das could translate them.

‘Gandhiji may be good for the country but not for the workers, because he stays with Birla.’

‘Gandhiji may be a great man, but he is not doing anything for us.’

‘He accepts Birla’s bread. How can he do anything for us?’

‘There was a firing and he didn’t say anything.’ I tried to inquire about this, but they swept right on.

‘When Gandhiji stays with Birla only one thought comes to us: he must be doing something for that worldly man.’

‘In relations to the workers Birla is not good. But to the outside world he tries to show himself as a great man. He builds temples to show the world his greatness.’

The greatness of Birla Temple is something no one who has seen it will ever forget. Its pink sandstone towers mount in chunky stalagmites over an entire hillside. Its gardens are a menagerie of sandstone animals, dominated by colossal pink elephants which raise their rigid trunks to the sky and cast their mobile reflections in pools at their huge carved feet. Inside, marble floors finished to mirror-brightness reflect the flood-lighted gods and goddesses that grace every vista. A staff of priests is maintained to bring daily offerings of fresh flowers and sweetmeats to these deities, whose pink-enamelled faces and plump polished forms give them a look of such abnormal health that I have always cherished the illusion that they stepped off their pedestals when no one was looking and devoured the sweetmeats. The New Delhi temple was the Birla family’s noblest effort. However, the textile king’s elder brother, the orthodox member of the family, had built many other temples only slightly less ornate.

‘Those temples are built with our sweat,’ Ram Das translated. The official government-audited figures for the textile industry during the war years showed profits rising from 300 to 700 per cent.

‘What good are temples to us?’ With the mention of temples the protests had become a chorus. ‘Workers care little for temples.’

‘Why not use the same wood and concrete to build better homes for us?’



‘Two hundred and fifty people use the same latrine.’ They showed me the primitive doorless cubicles. ‘There is no privacy. The women have to use the same ones.’ I knew that modesty with Indian women amounts almost to a religion.

‘And there is only one hand pump. This single hand pump serves sixty quarters. There is no place to have a bath.’

The daily bath is actually a religious injunction under Hinduism. With a religion in which cleanliness is so closely associated with godliness, I could see why these workers thought it more pertinent to have pumps at home than pools in a temple.

The Birla newspapers gave frequent publicity to the privileges of ‘temple entry’ granted in the Birla temples. Temple entry—the new practice of allowing untouchables to attend the same places of worship as caste Hindus—was a good thing, Ram Das thought. He was a caste Hindu himself (as were other workers in these quarters), and although he knew that some caste Hindus boycotted temples which permitted harijans to cross the threshold, all enlightened Hindus were against this discrimination. In a temple they were all worshippers together, Ram Das believed.

But likewise in a factory they were all workers together. And with all the fuss the inmates of Birla House made over untouchables—Gandhiji’s own newspaper was named *The Harijan*—why didn’t some of his followers come down from Birla House and see how the harijans were living who worked in Birla’s own mills? These ‘bustees’ I had just seen at least had brick floors and some primitive drains for sanitation, but the untouchables had nothing for floors but the earth inside their flimsy shelters, and for sanitary facilities nothing but the earth outside.

The bustees I had wandered into were palaces compared to the untouchables’ hovels, the ‘chawls’; however, there were still better bustees than these that I had seen—but not for ordinary workmen. The timekeepers and jobbers (middlemen through whom the hiring and firing is done) got better housing, and when it came to factory schools and milk distribution these benefits also went first to children of ‘loyal’ company men and jobbers.

The whole system of hiring and firing was a constant worry to the men, and the spectre of losing their jobs loomed over them always. Men could lose their jobs at a moment’s notice after work-



ing fifteen or even twenty-five years in the same mill, and if any severance payment was made it was handed to their jobber and that was the last they ever saw of it. They had tried to discuss all this only last week at a big workers' and managers' meeting at the mill, but as always seemed to happen at these huge factory conferences, only 'company men' were sitting near the microphone. If anyone else tried to raise his voice he was dubbed a Communist and turned out of the mill.

Now a new situation was developing. A great regrouping of unions was being engineered into existence, in which Birla and Patel were deeply interested. The new organization was known as INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress). INTUC was making considerable inroads into the old Indian Federation of Labour and, with the powerful hand of Patel, the Home Minister, behind it, INTUC was beginning to take on the character of one vast coalition of company unions under government sponsorship. Patel was currently making speeches promoting a non-strike resolution for INTUC which was intended to extend for three years.

There was no doubt that these textile workers, crowding around me, were profoundly distrustful of INTUC and regarded the trend of affairs with deep uneasiness. 'INTUC expects to lead us like sheep,' they told me.

As they talked, they pressed in closer, eager to express their opinions, and I managed to edge up to a little high place on the pump platform so as to have elbow room for jotting down notes. They were getting into technicalities now, like the relationship between their 'dearness allowance'—a sort of cost-of-living bonus—and something they called the 'government cost-of-living index'. With the slender margin on which they lived, they viewed the swift climb of prices with actual terror. During the war years, when the textile industry was operating at a high peak, they had managed to get their 'dearness' raised by 50 per cent, but prices during the same period rose 300 per cent. And this triple rise, they explained to me carefully, applied only to the 'controlled' prices published in the government index—black market prices, naturally, were unlisted. Now there was every prospect that prices would be decontrolled. The newspapers were full of agitation for decontrols on articles like cloth and sugar—'especially Birla's



newspapers', someone shouted from the edge of the crowd. 'And also Gandhiji's own newspaper, *The Harijan*,' a worker standing near me added anxiously. And there was never enough to go around even at the controlled prices. It seemed as though all the things they needed, even the cotton cloth which they themselves spun and wove, simply vanished into the black market to reappear at prices which only the rich could pay.

'Sometimes we wonder what happens to all those millions of yards of cloth we weave in the mill,' said one of the men, 'when we are passing our days in only one shirt.'

Suddenly I found I was shivering. We had talked so long, absorbed in the translation and clarification of these various points, that the sun had gone down. I never seemed able to accustom myself to the swift, treacherous chill which so abruptly cuts off the brief warmth of Indian winter days the moment after sundown. I descended from my pump platform to start home, but first the workers wanted me to take a look at one more residential section. Their bustees, though overcrowded, at least had room enough so the workers could live with their families. But I had not yet seen the most typical quarters. I had not seen the 'lines'.

The 'lines' could hardly have been simpler. Striped across the hard earth of the large enclosure into which they led me was a series of long parallel walls, and efficiently lining both sides of each wall—so that the wall itself formed the backs of duplicate dwellings—were endless identical cells. Ram Das took me into one of these; it measured, I estimated, about nine by twelve feet. Although there was one window, which let a little late daylight into the compartment, it took me a moment to comprehend the peculiar sight I saw on the floor: to grasp the fact that the tightly packed sausage rolls were sleeping men.

'Twenty-five men live in this room,' said Ram Das, and at the sound of his voice they began stirring and sitting up, and I could indeed see that these were men.

These were all weavers, I found, getting an average of thirty-five rupees a month, with the addition of the dearness allowance, which in this case amounted to forty-four rupees. The rupee is roughly equivalent to one shilling and sixpence, so translating this total into English money, each weaver received about thirty



shillings a week. They paid rent for their floor space—not much—it amounted to two rupees and twelve annas each, or just about four shillings a month.

At first this seemed a quite reasonable rent, four shillings per man per month, and it took me a few moments to perform the mental arithmetic required to see what the landlord was getting. Put twenty-five men in a room, and calculate on a basis of four rooms. This would make up about the same floor space as a modest workman's house or apartment (as we would think of it), yet without running water, light, furnace, or stove (except for three smooth stones in a court outside where a wood fire could be built), without even an individual outside toilet. For this space the company collected the near-equivalent of twenty-five pounds a month.

By the time I had completed this devastating arithmetic and someone had lighted the single candle on the single window sill, the men were rising to their feet and volunteering comments on their close quarters.

'Just imagine! We cannot even sit together!'

'How can we sleep? We sleep only because there are three different shifts in the mill, and when some of us are on the shift the rest will get room for sleeping.'

'Holidays are the most difficult. We cannot all sit down.'

'What do you do on your holidays?' I asked a boy whose age, I learned, was fourteen, yet whose pinched face could have been almost any age.

Young Jamnadas squirmed around on his bare feet, too shy to answer at first, but I persisted. 'Do you play games?' It was a cruel question. No, on holidays he did not play games. Nor on Sundays? On Sundays and holidays he washed his clothes. He had gone to school for a year or two, however, and his lustreless eyes picked up a spark of life as he recalled this. But no, Jamnadas could not remember when he had last played games.

'Even smaller boys are working for eight hours in this mill,' said the weavers. 'And they have no time to play either. None of us can play. How can we play? To play, one must get enough energy, and because grain is so dear now, we eat less. And because we eat less we can only do our duties in the mill. No more!'

Then there was the additional responsibility that most of these



men had. Ram Das explained. There were families still living back in the home village who needed support. 'Those who have families', he said, 'are taking next to nothing and going about hungry.'

The impossibility of getting quarters where they could bring their families to live with them was their most acute grievance. These men, like fathers the world over, wanted the chance to see their children growing up around them. And with no wives to cook for them, there was often not enough time for standing in the pump queue and then the stove queue every morning—even if they clubbed together and had one man cook for several before rushing off to work.

But most of all, these men suffered from gnawing worry about their absent families. And in these troubled times their uneasiness was heightened by the possibility that religious rioting might break out where their families lived. This dread, added to their certain knowledge that the amount they could salvage from each week's pay was not enough for their people back home to manage on, haunted their lives.

It was on the 8th December (just five weeks, it happened, before Gandhiji's fast) that the mill workers went to the manager and demanded more dearness allowance. 'Prices are soaring,' they told him, 'and we cannot maintain our families.' To this the manager replied, 'If you are not satisfied with the scale we are paying you, you can leave.' But instead of leaving, more and more workers crowded into the factory compound while the manager leaned out of his office window and shouted that they were 'persistent and impertinent'. Through the window they could see the manager reach for his telephone. It was only a matter of minutes before four armed constables had arrived and started pushing back the mill hands with their rifle butts. Suddenly without warning the policemen fired into the crowded compound. One weaver was killed and several were badly wounded.

So a delegation of five weavers started off for Birla House to tell Gandhiji about it.

I suppose it was their misfortune to have reached there so late at night, but Albuquerque Road in New Delhi is a long trek from the Sabzi Mandi in the old city. It was nine o'clock when they



finally arrived at Birla House gates and they were told to come again the next day. At the appointed time they returned, and were informed that Gandhi had no time to see them before the 13th of December, another four days! The thirteenth brought them no better luck. 'The workers' case cannot be properly heard by Gandhiji,' they decided, 'because he lives with Birlaji.'

However, the firing without warning into the courtyard packed with workers had filled them with such rage and desire for justice that the delegation continued the rounds of government leaders. 'All doors were knocked on,' they told me—including Patel's. That the Home Minister's front door did not swing wide when they arrived hardly surprised me, because the Sardar was very busy making speeches these days, in the effort to get the voluntary non-strike resolution voluntarily adopted by INTUC. Recently Bombay, which is very much of a workers' town, had staged a city-wide one-day hartal (cessation of work and closing of shops) as a protest against the three-year no-strike proposal. And Patel had replied with the unforgettable sentence: 'Strikes are a nuisance.'

However, the minor 'nuisance' value of these five persistent weavers was brought quietly to an end a few days later by the arrest of the most outspoken of the mill workers and a scattering of their union leaders.

'We thought putting union leaders behind bars without trial would end when we got independence,' said Ram Das, as he guided me through the dark network of open drains and high-walled alleys to my taxi, 'but it is still a common custom in India.'

We found my driver with his head pillowed on the steering wheel, snoring so noisily that we both laughed. The driver sat up in extremely dazed fashion, and as I climbed into the cab Ram Das said, with a final unexpected touch of whimsy: 'With the end of British imperialism one thing is still the same, isn't it? The employer has the freedom to keep the profits and the workers have the freedom to keep the peace.'



## Chapter VII

### CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY

#### BIRLA: APOSTLE OF TRUSTEESHIP

WHEN I returned to the hotel I found a telephone message which notified me of an appointment I had requested the day before and very much wanted. It was set for next day, noon—at Birla House—with Mr. G. D. Birla.

In addition to the textile industry with which his name was most frequently associated, Ghanshyamdas Birla was prominent in the sugar industry—much in the news then because of the agitation for decontrolling it—as well as in jute, motor-cars, bicycles, boilers, calcium carbides, industrial alcohol, linoleum, woollens, flax, ghee (clarified butter used in all the best Indian cooking, and in such Hindu religious rites as daily offerings to the household gods, and the final ceremonies of the funeral pyre), margarine (used in Indian cooking by families who cannot afford ghee), and also starch, confectionery, banking, and insurance. In addition to this comprehensive list, Mr Birla owned several newspapers and had a large interest in radio. He had been in America and he had powerful business connections in England. Birla was generally thought of as India's number-one industrialist, and he was certainly most interesting to me because of his close relationship with the leading figures in government and his extraordinary association with Gandhi.

I wanted to learn from Mr Birla his attitude toward a principle which stemmed from Gandhi's ideals—the conception of 'trusteeship'. Gandhi's secretary, Pyarelal, had previously defined this to me as 'the chance we give to capitalists and owners of wealth to transform themselves into trustees of that wealth and property, instead of simply liquidating them as such'. He had explained that Gandhi believed 'wealth must not exist for selfish purposes, but for the profit of society as a whole, the owner being entitled to a commission, a commission to be decided upon by the people.'

Pyarelal had spoken of 'Birla's charities—the long list' and had



added that 'Birla dare not treat the factory workers shabbily because he would not be able to vindicate himself before Gandhiji.'

When I reached Birla House next day for my appointment, I was conducted through rooms furnished in contrasting styles. Some were Westernized and modern, others were done Indian fashion, with no furniture except the customary mattresses and bolsters on the floor. It was in one of these Indian rooms, I recalled, that a year ago I had photographed another star guest, Birla's close friend Vallabhbhai Patel, who often shared Birla's home on trips to Delhi.

Then all at once I was in a long, glassed-in drawing-room which might have been in Tulsa or London or Luxemburg, for its quiet rich taste was international. Briskly rising from a sofa and courteously greeting me was a well-groomed figure clad in snowy khaddar: the dean of trustees.

I was interested that this mighty manufacturer of machine textiles was wearing the homespun khaddar which to Gandhi's followers was almost a uniform. But even the characteristically Indian touch of shirt-tails worn outside the dhoti-styled trousers could not alter that alert, practical, rather impersonal impression one gets from business-men the world over. He looked much younger than his fifty-five years; he was cordial in his manner, and free from pretentiousness. I was sure Mr Birla was a direct person, so I plunged right into the subject which interested me most and asked him about trusteeship.

His answer was as straight to the point as I had expected: 'It needs a strong will power to follow the spiritual principles of Gandhiji.'

This reply impressed me by what it said and what it left unsaid. What it left unsaid had been answered in a sense by his own textile workers. In this one concise sentence, it seemed to me, Birla had suggested the human limitations of the plan.

'Trusteeship is an idea with which I don't think anyone could disagree,' Birla went on, 'whether a rich business-man or a politician or a doctor. It is in strict accord with the Hindu philosophy whereby we live only for the service of mankind. How far a man can be an actual trustee depends on his spiritual strength.'

I was interested to know how much Gandhi's idea had influ-



enced him. 'It influenced me a lot,' said Birla. 'I realize my responsibilities as a business-man. I live more for service than the accumulation of wealth.'

Then suddenly he stopped this line of questioning with the firm statement: 'I think this becomes much too personal, Miss Bourke-White.'

So I stepped into what I was sure was safe territory and inquired about the many temples the Birlas had built. Temple building, Birla pointed out, was mainly the interest of his elder brother, who was 'very religious-minded'.

'Frankly speaking,' said Mr Birla, 'we build temples but we don't believe in temples.' Here, surprisingly, was a point of contact between the Birla family and the Birla workers; both groups disbelieved in temples. 'We build temples to spread a kind of religious mentality.'

I never missed an opportunity to question people close to the Mahatma about their earliest impressions, because the great variety among the followers he had attracted seemed to me one of the most remarkable things about Gandhi. I asked Mr Birla if he could recall his first meeting.

'I remember exactly,' Mr Birla replied. 'It was in December 1915. I was a young man then.' Gandhiji had just returned from South Africa, where he had abandoned his profitable private law practice to devote himself to his Indian countrymen who were employed there at starvation wages, frequently beaten and otherwise mistreated, and were the victims of what the Indians called the 'racial arrogance' of white South Africans. Birla told me of how Gandhi was to make a speech in Calcutta on the subject of freedom. 'How did I know he was such an important man? Everybody knew what he did in South Africa. We organized a grand reception in his honour. I was the moving spirit behind it.'

I was eager to hear how Gandhiji appeared to this young man from a wealthy family, already launched on a successful business career. 'At this first meeting he appeared very queer,' said Mr Birla. 'He was dressed in a queer manner. He had a queer manner of speech. I was rather puzzled about him when I first saw him, and then gradually I came to know him, how he is full of honesty and straightforwardness. He gave us a new conception of politics.'

We felt him a saint as well as a politician. We became reconciled to his queerness. I think the whole of India began to become queer after him. That meeting was thirty-two years ago, and since then I have been associated with him and have been giving him such service as I can.'

As we discussed our next topic, the fanatical and fascist tendencies of the R.S.S., neither of us could have guessed that the time was not far off when one of its members would strike down Gandhi on Mr Birla's own garden path. 'I don't take the R.S.S. seriously,' said Mr Birla. 'It has no political influence. There is no principle behind it except hatred. Once the country settles down, then no one will have this hatred. One cannot live on hatred.'

Its parent body, the Hindu Mahasabha, he also dismissed as 'having no political influence'. He believed the Mahasabha, like the R.S.S., 'would die out'. In the future 'political parties must be based on economics'.

I felt relieved to have got through my inquiries on the Mahasabha without getting jumped on once more as being 'too personal'. It was well known that Birla House had two wings: while the younger brother supported Gandhi, the elder was close to the Hindu Mahasabha. Just how close had never been divulged. The orthodox elder brother was a little-known personality who stayed out of the limelight. Yet since the two brothers owned joint property—undivided, according to ancient Hindu law—the same fortune which backed Gandhi and the Congress on a platform of non-violence and religious tolerance at the same time supported the Mahasabha's orthodox Hinduism, which stood for anything but tolerance and had been responsible for much violence.

With all the government planning that had followed independence, nationalization was now a lively issue and I was interested in seeing how Birla felt about it.

'If the people want it,' he said. 'But certainly not textiles,' he added quickly. 'But people don't know what they are talking about.' Nationalization is only a slogan.' He thought England under the Labour government was an example of the inefficient working of nationalization. America, he believed, had got much further without it. He had been to America, and admired it greatly.



He hoped greatly to be able to do business with the United States. The difficulty was getting dollars. He believed it would be easier to attract the interest of foreign capital to India if there were not all this talk of nationalization. 'It is not desirable,' he concluded positively. 'But we business-men have full faith in the man in the street. He will realize it is not desirable.'

The man in the street did not want price controls either, I recalled, according to recent editorials in Mr Birla's sixteen newspapers. I asked how he himself felt about price controls.

'I never was in favour of controls. I am not built that way. The greatest virtue of capitalism is free competition.' And Mr Birla pointed out that since the recent removal of government control on sugar the price had already gone down.

There was a kind of twisted truth in this. The controversy on sugar control had been so heated—with even Gandhi taking sides—that I had looked into sugar prices. For the well-to-do the price had indeed come down. For those who had bought at black market prices the price had fallen 4 annas a seer, or 5d. for 2 pounds. For those who had to buy at the legal controlled prices or not buy at all, the price had soared from 12 annas to 1 rupee and 8 annas a seer. Thus where the luxury trade saved 2½d. a pound, the man in the street, whose opinions were quoted so often, was paying 1s. 3d. a pound where only two weeks ago he had paid 7½d. With decontrol, the legal price of sugar had exactly doubled.

Gandhi had advocated removing government controls on prices at a succession of recent prayer meetings. Certainly he must have believed he was serving public interest. It is unthinkable that Gandhiji would have twisted a point even to serve his friend and host (who had been making a government-set profit of 300 per cent, and with decontrol would clear much more). Gandhi's stand had surprised many of his hearers, and I was eager to hear what Mr Birla had to say about it.

'Do you and Gandhi confer on these issues?' I asked.

Not at all, Mr Birla told me. 'Gandhiji has his own views. My views and his happen to coincide.'

There was one field in which Birla's and Gandhi's views did not coincide, and it was such a dramatic difference of opinion that everyone commented on it. While Birla was the leading machine

textile manufacturer in the land, Gandhi's opposition to machine-made textiles was a matter of history. To Gandhi, the hand spinning wheel or charkha was more than something with which to spin: it was a symbol—a trade mark of cottage industry as opposed to the machine. Then Mr Birla made a statement that surprised me. 'His philosophy is that he doesn't believe in too high a standard of living.' When I looked into this later I found that Mr Birla was quite right. Nehru himself had been worried and unwilling to accept Gandhi's glorification of poverty. The Mahatma did not want to raise the standard of living of the masses too high because it might lead to sin and indulgence.

'And how do you feel about that?'

'I am quite different. I am an industrialist.'

'What are your points of contact with Gandhi's beliefs?' I asked, hoping I would get a fuller answer this time.

'I believe in truth. Honesty. Straightforwardness. Highest personal conduct.' He looked through his plate-glass window, past the tiered waterfalls of his artificial brook, toward the pale sky arched high above his tallest shade trees, and added, 'I believe in simplicity of life.' We both sat silent for a moment, then he said, 'I believe in a life of service.'

'Do you do more in social welfare in your mills than others? Or pay higher wages?'

Wages, he told me, were 'equal to the highest'. Social welfare also was 'equal to the highest'. Everything that other factories provided, the Birla mills provided also, in hospitals, in housing 'at a very nominal rent', in 'free, nice schools'. I had been sure there would be hospitals, for India has a Factories Act which requires an employer to furnish certain health facilities. I knew on the testimony of the textile workers that there were 'free, nice schools'. It was unfortunate that I could not get their chorus of voices out of my mind: 'It is all wrong! The schools and milk are only for the managers' and timekeepers' children.'

'How do you feel about the proposed labour legislation—things like workmen's compensation and social insurance?'

'I wouldn't mind compensation and insurance. It's not the employer who pays. It is the consumer who pays.'

'Do you believe in the right to strike?'



‘Why strike if everything is O.K.?’ said Mr Birla.

I had risen to leave now; I decided I would run the risk once more of being ‘too personal’ by coming back to the subject of trusteeship, and I asked, ‘What are the points of similarity between your philosophy and the Gandhian philosophy?’

‘No similarity,’ Birla answered with finality. ‘I am an industrialist and a mill owner. He is a saint. How could there be any similarity? But all the good things he’s got attract me. If you have good intentions, you are bound to be influenced by all good men.’

‘Does Gandhi advise you about social welfare for your workers?’

‘He doesn’t tell me what I should do or not do in my mills.’

Well, why not, I wondered, as I started home. Every day Gandhi advised hundreds of people on countless subjects, ranging from the most intimate details of their lives to matters deeply affecting national policy. Why not advise Birla on how he should treat the workmen in his mills? Gandhi was against the evil conditions under which factory workers had to live. Birla was in an exceptional position—he actually determined the way multitudes of factory workers lived.

For nearly a quarter of a century Birla’s house had been a camp for Gandhi’s visits. Here under the same roof was this industrialist who seemed genuinely devoted to Gandhi. Where was a better person through whom to try out trusteeship? Yet after years of contact closer to the Gandhian influence than enjoyed by any other industrialist, Birla could point to nothing ‘not found in any large mill’—not even some little token pension plan, perhaps, or some slight improvement in his untouchables’ hovels. He furnished for his workmen exactly what his competitors in industry furnished. What I had seen was ‘equal to the highest’.

Mr Birla, with his characteristic talent for striking to the core, had pointed out the weakness of the trusteeship plan. ‘It needs a strong will,’ he said. ‘How far a man can be an actual trustee depends on the spiritual strength of the man.’ If in thirty-two years of intimate association Mr Birla with his genuine affection and veneration for Gandhi had not absorbed sufficient spiritual strength to be a trustee, where outside this close circle could you hope to find the industrialist, the owner of property, the mahara-

jah, the business-man who would have the spiritual strength for trusteeship?

### SETH DALMIA

Among the mighty trinity of Indian industrialists, Birla, Dalmia, and Tata, Messrs Birla and Tata have included only the briefest and most factual accounts of themselves in that lively and informative volume *Who's Who in India*. As in America, the notables furnish their own biographical sketches, but in the Indian *Who's Who* it is not considered bad form to include a reference to one's 'anonymous charities'.

The Dalmia entry reads like a rhapsody. 'His charities run into millions, but, publicity being avoided, few know much about them. . . . He has stripped himself of all earthly possessions and voluntarily adopted the life of a poor man, just to have a foretaste of the joys of poverty, which are ever denied to the wealthy.'

Seth Ramkrishna Dalmia must have had to do a good deal of stripping, for his interests permeate nearly every major industry on the Indian subcontinent, including some in Pakistan. Among the Dalmia enterprises are cement, airlines, a railway, electrical companies, chemical works, plywood, collieries, sugar, soap, margarine, textiles, banks, insurance, and a chain of newspapers which include the leading Bombay daily, *The Times of India*, and a noted Pakistan paper, *The Civil & Military Gazette* (on which in pre-Dalmia days the young Rudyard Kipling worked as a reporter and assistant editor).

Yet one heard less about the multiplicity of his business interests than the multiplicity of his wives. Reports differed as to the number of wives, and Dalmia's voluminous autobiographical writings are tantalizingly vague on this point. Dalmia has written: 'I have married many a time. I have committed sins many a time. . . . An ordinary person perhaps would have hesitated to commit such sins.'

Remarks like this had me in a highly curious mood on the day that I knocked on the great panelled door of Dalmia House, not far from the Birla mansion in New Delhi. I was received by a wife, a small woman, with an air of utmost gravity. Showing restrained pleasure that a Western journalist had come to call on her husband, she guided me into the shadows of a long drawing-room



for a preliminary chat. Mrs Dalmia began by interrogating me. Whom did I know in India?

This was such a curious question that I was sure there was a catch in it. My vague answer obviously did not satisfy her. She became specific. Did I know the Birlas?

So that was it! I had heard of Dalmia's driving jealousy of Birla, which had shaped his entire career. Somehow the younger, more personable Birla always managed to be first. Birla had adopted Gandhi; Dalmia began backing Jinnah. Birla helped finance the Congress Party; so Dalmia lent support to the Muslim League. But being an orthodox Hindu, he also directed a portion of his generosity toward the Hindu Mahasabha. With the coming of independence, Birla became the number-one business-man of India. So Dalmia made up his mind to be business wizard for Pakistan. But with the bloody Hindu-Muslim conflict, Dalmia suffered in Hindu opinion, which meant that the Dalmia-Jain financial network suffered. The Pakistan investment had backfired. Too late to become a Gandhi supporter, Dalmia must find a new cause.

When the more fanatically Hindu wing of the Congress began demanding legislation to protect the cow, Dalmia had his opportunity. The Congress was a mixed body, with Muslim members to whom the cow was not sacred, and some modernized Hindus unorthodox enough to enjoy a beefsteak now and then. The Congress was willing to look kindly on the cow, but incorporating cow protection into the nation's laws was quite another matter. Here was the perfect cause for Dalmia. Agitation against cow slaughter has the same appeal to the orthodox Hindu as baby kissing to the voting mother. Dalmia would ride to popularity on the cow.

Dalmia was now ready to see me. I was conducted to another wing of the house, Mrs Dalmia opened a door, ushered me inside, and left me there.

It took me a moment to realize I was in the presence of Seth Ramkrishna Dalmia. To my astonishment, the great industrialist was receiving me in bed. The room was simple. There was no carpet. There were few furnishings of any sort besides the bed, which stood in the exact centre of the floor.

Sitting, or rather bouncing, on the white sheets, flinging his arms about like a pent-up child, was a strange, wild-eyed, wiry

figure. He laughed and talked a great deal, and it was difficult for me to follow what he was saying. At first I assumed he was speaking of the cow, but gradually I realized that his topic was far greater. He was talking about the entire world.

We must wipe out the boundaries and come to internationalism. We must abolish those meaningless parcels called nations. We must use the same currency, speak the same language, follow the same eternal verities. There should be one supreme religion. There should be one flag: the flag of One. This was the Dalmia theory of One World.

I was interested to know whether he had read Wendell Wilkie's *One World*. No, he had not read it himself, but his secretary had. 'But I thought of the idea first,' he added brightly.

Dalmia's next statements made his idea of One more clear. 'There must be a dictator elected by the people. And with unrestricted powers. It must be for at least ten years. I don't like short terms for dictators.' The author of One did not become specific as to whom he had in mind for this high post, but he assured me he was prepared to devote his humble services to the cause and had hopes of achieving his great purpose 'single-handed'.

Despite his glib catchwords, I felt I could not pass glibly over the man himself. Eccentric though he might be, he still was one of an exceedingly small group who controlled an overwhelming portion of the resources, finances, and industries of the new free India. The important thing was not that he was telling me, 'Everyone should have a house, bread, and an education,' but that he did so little to bring it about. In recent weeks he had been running editorials in his newspapers advocating 'Cow Economy as a Cure for Inflation', yet he pocketed the inflationary profits of his vast industrial empire, while the cost of living doubled and tripled.

With all his talk of One, I ventured to ask how a man who believed in Oneness for the world could believe in many wives for himself. He replied that he had thought all this over and decided he was against it. 'I am going to write a book on polygamy,' he told me, 'to warn others against the act.' It had brought nothing but troubles on his head, he said, troubles he could only regard as 'spiritual dumb-bells'—here he flexed his arms to fit his figure of speech—as dumb-bells for spiritual exercise to purify my soul.'



When the little burst of calisthenics was over, I rose to shake hands and say good-bye. Offering Dalmia my hand was a mistake! 'Not for a woman,' he murmured, placing his palms together in the Hindu gesture of farewell. 'Only the husband should touch a woman's hand.'

## TATA

Jehangir Ruttonji Dadabhoy Tata offers a sharp contrast to the flamboyant Dalmia. J. R. D., or 'Jeh', as everyone calls him, is chairman of the greatest steel firm in Asia and founder of India's leading airline, yet there is little of the tycoon in his unassuming manner and appearance. He is thin and fastidious, wears a small moustache, and invariably dresses in European clothes. His Westernized manner is probably attributable to his French mother, and there is much of the French in his disposition: often charming, sometimes irritable, always alert. He has, in addition, an insatiable fondness for comic strips.

In contrast to Dalmia's florid self-description in *Who's Who*, Tata's terse sketch includes just one personal note: he was the 'first pilot to qualify in India, holding a flying licence since 1929', and in 1932 he flew the mail planes. He makes no mention in *Who's Who* of 'charities', but a perusal of the attractively printed booklets about the firms shows that three generations of Tatas, in addition to living exceedingly well and paying handsome dividends to stockholders, have devoted 85 per cent of the profits of the parent firm, Tata Sons, to maintaining the Tata Trusts, which administer the Tata philanthropies.

Designed to 'eradicate the root causes of poverty, disease, and distress,' the trusts endow a hospital for cancer research and contribute to scholarships for medical researchers. Trust funds provide health services for Tata employees, finance famine and flood relief, support an Institute of Social Sciences, a Child Guidance Clinic, contribute to the Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore, with its departments of metallurgy, aeronautics, and bio-chemistry, and to the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in theoretical physics and cosmic radiation, administered jointly with the government of Bombay.

While the Tatas are remarkable people, the Parsee community

to which they belong is no less remarkable. The Parsees are descended from Persians, of the Zoroastrian faith, who fled to India to escape Mohammedan persecution in the seventh and eighth centuries, carrying with them their Sacred Fire, the symbol of purity, which still burns in their Fire Temples. They have been ahead of all other groups in India in taking to Western education and ways. According to the 1941 census, there are—in contrast to 275 million Hindus, 91 million Muslims, 7 million Indian Christians, and 5 million Sikhs—barely one hundred thousand Parsees in all India, yet their business and political sagacity and their readiness to pioneer in industry and education have given them a leading place in Indian public life.

Probably the greatest Indian industrial pioneer of the last century was Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, J. R. D.'s grandfather, who realized that Indian industry could never be Indian-run unless the country produced a large number of scientists and technicians. He laid the groundwork for the Institute of Science, to train native personnel, iron and steel works on which to base a native economy, and hydro-electric stations to furnish cheap power and conserve coal reserves. He did not live to see the great steel town—named Jamshedpur after him—literally carved out of the Bihar jungles on the site of rich ore deposits, but this is his monument to-day. By 1914 the plant was producing steel on a commercial scale; the firm grew enormously through both World Wars. When independence came to India, Tata's was the greatest producer of steel in the British Commonwealth and the third largest self-contained iron and steel plant in the world.

Forty-four-year-old J. R. D. Tata is probably the cleverest business-man in India, the only one who really understands Western business methods. He administers interests ranging from building locomotives and assembling airplanes to running Bombay's foremost hotel, making dyes, soap, margarine, cement, textiles, and industrial chemicals, producing hydro-electric power, investigating the atom, and pioneering in global air travel.

It is not only in the field of air travel that Tata shows his comprehension of the way the world is moving. He recognizes that labour is a growing political force and, according to some people who know him well, is not eager to see this happen. He does not



fear Communists, whose strength is negligible in his areas, but worries over the increasingly numerous Socialists and their 'half-baked' ideas about running industry. One hears many contradictory opinions of J. R. D. Tata, and there is an element of truth in all. He is the progressive industrialist: he provides a profit-sharing bonus plan and better than average working conditions; but his knowledge of Western labour relations often enables him to out-guess India's less experienced labour leaders. Tata's has had a company-dominated union, well staffed with his own men, which now has joined the great government-sponsored merger of unions—INTUC. All other unions are effectively discouraged.

Meanwhile, the fine housing which old Jamsetji planned for his workers continues to be the best in all India. But Jamshedpur, centre of the Tata steel industry, has grown phenomenally. So, while one-third of the steelworkers' families have their neat houses and individual garden plots, for which they pay only minimal rents to the firm, the rest are squeezed into whatever overcrowded quarters they can find, at the mercy of private landlords, with no immediate prospect of additional company-provided housing.

Despite all such shortages, Jamshedpur, with its hospital, free milk for babies, and paid maternity leaves for working mothers, is far in advance of any other industrial centre I visited in India. Nothing could have made a better impression on me than my unannounced visit to the non-profit factory restaurant. I ate excellently cooked chapatties, rice, and that Indian delicacy, fried cauliflower—available to all for only a few annas, a few pennies.

At the Tata Works I found more freedom of speech than at other plants, and no evidences of religious or caste prejudice. While I was there the employees' weekly newspaper was full of details of a drive to help untouchable workers who had been victimized by unscrupulous moneylenders in town.

J. R. D. Tata's own hatred of racial discrimination was demonstrated on a recent visit to America. In the South he was shocked by the separate drinking fountains labelled 'White' and 'Coloured'. To the consternation of the Southern factory executives accompanying him, the light-complexioned, well-tailored Tata, who looks more European than Indian, insisted on drinking from the 'Coloured' fountains.

## Chapter VIII

### GANDHI

#### AMONG THE UNTOUCHABLES

ON one of his trips to Delhi, Gandhi decided not to stay at Birla House but to move in with the untouchables in their Bhangi Colony. His choice excited great public interest. This was not the first time he had elected to share the living quarters of the harijans—the Children of God, as he called the untouchables—but it was by far the most dramatic, for he had come to Delhi to take part in negotiations of a very high order.

In March 1946, all Indian leaders were flocking to Delhi to meet with the British Cabinet Mission, to lay the ground plan of the coming freedom. The British ministers were Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, India's Secretary of State, and Mr A. V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty.

The members of the working press in Delhi had formed the habit of visiting the Bhangi Colony every day to observe the mounting preparations for Gandhi's arrival, which had been going on for seven days. The residents of half the Bhangi Colony had been moved out—I never discovered where, perhaps to that part of the colony which had been left in its virgin squalor. The chawls of these deported residents had been torn down and neat little huts constructed in their places. The increased height and spaciousness of these huts made it possible for people to stand and walk upright instead of stooping or crawling, as is necessary in most untouchables' chawls. Aside from that, there was nothing elaborate about the new quarters. They did have one feature which we correspondents all admired. The entrances and windows were screened with kus-kus, a kind of woven fibre which, when liberally sprayed with water, cools the interior and makes life bearable through Delhi's all but intolerable spring and summer heat.

On the eighth day a squad of water boys arrived with sausage-shaped goatskin water bags and began the continuous spraying



which beat down the choking dust and kept the kus-kus dripping and cool throughout the entire span of Gandhi's residence. On the eighth day, also, I happened to chat with a pleasant and quietly competent little man who pointed out the new whitewash on the colony's little Hindu temple, the freshly constructed temple platform, the smart brick edging of the newly laid paths. He introduced himself as Dinanath Tiang, of the Birla Company. 'We have cared for Gandhiji's comfort for the last twenty years,' said Dinanath with quiet pride.

On the ninth day a squad arrived with electric fans, typewriters, and telephones for each hut. We reporters were frankly envious. There was a dearth of electric fans in Delhi, typewriters were all but unobtainable, and getting a telephone installed involved endless red tape.

On the tenth day Gandhi himself arrived. The arrival was uneventful. There was a small Black Flag demonstration by a handful of untouchables who gathered outside the gate. These were followers of the famous untouchable Dr Ambedkar, a brilliant lawyer, educated at Columbia University, who for years led an anti-Gandhi party because of his belief that untouchables were given insufficient political safeguards by Gandhi and the Congress. (With independence Dr Ambedkar became Minister for Law and helped draw up the new constitution, which provides equality of opportunity for untouchables.) After this orderly and tiny showing of protest flags, the ashram established itself quietly and smoothly in the Bhangi Colony. *Life* magazine had scheduled a feature on India's political leaders, for which my negatives must be rushed back to New York. I got in touch at once with one of Gandhi's secretaries for permission to photograph the Mahatma with his spinning wheel. This was the beginning of my acquaintance with Pyarelal.

'Do you know how to spin?' asked Pyarelal.

'Oh, I didn't come to spin. I came to take pictures of the Mahatma spinning.'

'And you are not familiar with the workings of the charkha?'

'I'm afraid not. Just with the workings of the camera.'

'How can you photograph Mahatmaji spinning until first you understand the spinning wheel, a most delicate, intricate, and

marvellous instrument? It is a marvel of human ingenuity, and it is machinery reduced to the level of the toiling masses.

'It illustrates a major tenet of Gandhiji's: when individually considered, man is insignificant—even like a drop of water. But in the mass he becomes mighty and powerful like the ocean. When the millions of drops combine, they make a sea which bears on its bosom the whole fleet; even so it is with the masses when they have learned to combine. The charkha typifies what Gandhi has called the proletarianism of science. Consider the great machines of the factories with all their complex mechanism, and consider the charkha. The hand-driven spinning wheel reaches the highest coefficient of efficiency.'

'You will make me drop photography and take up spinning,' I said politely, wondering when we could get back to the subject of my appointment.

'That is just what I wish to do,' said Pyarelal. 'The remarkable achievement of the hand-driven spinning wheel is the successful elimination of all steel and metal. It is constructed without ball bearings. There is not even a nail. Its materials are local products, just like flowers that grow from the soil.'

'Well, there's one thing,' I interrupted desperately. 'Spinning and photography. They're both handicrafts.'

'Ah! But the greater of the two is spinning!'

I was caught like a fly in the twisted threads of the charkha. The more I struggled, the more those strands of oratory bound me helpless . . . 'the criss-cross bands of strings . . . the spring action . . . the almost negligible friction of the lubricating pin . . . the upright wheel'—I was being crucified on the charkha.

'And I will give you another tip. While your camera will cover the outward appearance of Gandhiji, your story on spinning will interpret his soul. Therefore you must first systematically master the principles of the charkha. After Tuesday I shall be able to instruct you at my leisure. But to-day I must compose the editorials for *The Harijan*. I think I have given you enough for to-day. Digest it, cook it up, and bring it back to me. Then I shall undertake to teach you to spin.'

I do not remember exactly how I persuaded Gandhi's secretary that I must have my spinning lesson to-day—this very day, and



that the appointment with the Mahatma must follow. My methods were non-violent—but just barely!

During the limping course of my lesson it helped me very little to have Pyarelal remark that progress in spinning was directly related to the level of one's intelligence. As I kept making awkward mistakes and breaking the thread, I began to appreciate, as never before, the machine age with its ball bearings and steel parts and maybe an occasional nail to take over from the human hand. But finally I was told I might pick up my equipment and go into Gandhi's hut.

'You understand. He will pay no attention to you.'

I understood. It was his day of silence. And I was overjoyed. If he paid no attention to me he wouldn't stop me.

'And you realize that you are not to use flash-bulbs.'

'Why?' This was serious. I could see from the outside of the hut that there would be very little light within.

'It disturbs his vision.'

During some of his prayer speeches in the past, Gandhi had advised mothers to have their babies look into the sun, apparently believing that the glare improved the vision. By using this and other arguments I finally won permission to use three flash-bulbs, and picking up all my photographic and synchronizing machinery I went inside.

It was even worse than I had imagined. A little daylight came in, but it couldn't have been in a more unfortunate spot. From an uncovered window directly above Gandhiji's head a single dazzling beam shone directly into my lens. His nut-brown body sank into the indistinct background in a dense fog of halation, which no shading or manœuvring seemed to cure. He was reading a large pile of newspaper clippings, bowed over them so his features disappeared in the shadows. As Pyarelal had predicted, he paid no attention to me, for which I was grateful.

My shutters and synchronizers, which normally work quite well, suddenly develop idiosyncrasies and refuse to function properly when confronted with some difficult and important personality. It happened with King Farouk of Egypt, with Mr Churchill, with the Emperor of Ethiopia, and with the Pope. Probably the change from a cold to a warm climate did not help

my equipment any. I tried loosening up the equipment by taking some slow time shots before using up my flash-bulbs. The shutter began catching on the automatic release device, gaping wide open and refusing to close. When I coaxed that into action, the blade-arrester gadget thrust itself in the way. The film adapters kept slipping in crooked and sticking. The paper pulls on the film pack tore in half when the films were only partly drawn. As I turned to my tripod, two legs stuck at their shortest position while a third became wedged at its maximum length.

Then Gandhi laid aside his clippings and started to spin. I decided to risk the first flash-bulb. It was quite plain from the span of time between bulb flash and shutter click that the camera hadn't synchronized. The second shot sounded perfect and I was overjoyed, only to observe in the next second that I had forgotten to pull the slide. I drew a long breath before taking the third, checked everything, watched Gandhi carefully, and when he touched the fine cotton thread with his brown hand, gathered it up skilfully and beautifully, I caught him on the upstroke, and the camera sounded perfect. I threw my arms around the equipment and rushed out of the hut, feeling that I wasn't so enamoured with the machine age after all. Not until I held the finished photograph in my hands did my faith return completely.

In the weeks that followed I became a frequenter of the ashram, as were all correspondents, for during the period of the British-Indian negotiations, the Bhangi Colony became a sort of summer White House. The formal Cabinet Ministers' conferences were held at the Vice-Regal Palace. However, despite the fact that Gandhi neither held nor wanted to hold any actual position in government, no important decision was made without consulting him. Dignitaries streamed through the gates into the untouchables' quarters, including the members of that distinguished trio, Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, and the First Lord of the Admiralty.

There were only two important personages in Delhi who did not come. One was Mahomed Ali Jinnah, the arch-opponent of a united India. He was then in the heat of manœuvring for a separate Pakistant and could hardly have been expected to come to Gandhi's door. The other was Herbert Hoover, who had ar-



rived at the head of the American Food Mission, to confer with Indian leaders regarding distribution of American food grains to ward off the threatened Indian famine. Mr Hoover did not need to come to Gandhi, as a conference was arranged at Vice-Regal Lodge to bring Gandhi to Hoover.

An invitation was also extended to Mr Jinnah to meet Mr Hoover and give his opinions on the food needs of his people, to which the Muslim leader replied that if Hoover wanted to talk with Jinnah, Hoover must come to Jinnah's house. No one could have been more astonished than Hoover when this was reported to him. With the country rocked to its foundations by the unity-versus-division controversy, he made a retort that was widely repeated, and warmed the hearts of non-Muslims: 'Who is Jinnah? Never heard of him.'

With the exception of Mr Hoover, people great and small who wanted to talk with Gandhi had to rise early in the morning. Every day before sunrise Gandhi walked one mile back and forth through the garden, conferring with his visitors, who had to break into a fast trot to keep up with him, while he dictated to his secretaries who raced just behind. Nehru, Patel, and other political leaders often conferred with Gandhi during the dawn walks. However important the visitor might be, Gandhi would only make an appointment at five or six in the morning, so that he might talk as he walked.

'He will never accept an excuse from a public man on the ground that he is too occupied,' Pyarelal told me. 'Gandhiji has often said that if he had to make a choice between missing a meal and missing a walk, he would miss the first. It's an illustration of his philosophy of physical fitness.'

My own physical fitness was tested during this period. My Gandhian jinx still accompanied me to these morning walks. If I got up at half-past four, managed to corner a taxi driver to drive me to the ashram, and arrived for a walk which I had heard would begin promptly at six, I would find that on this day the Mahatma had walked at five. When I arrived at five, I would discover that Gandhi and his retinue would have vanished to some new location for the morning exercise. When my presence on the spot and Gandhi's walk did happen to coincide, the half-light combined

with the flash-bulb ban would make it impossible to get a satisfactory negative. I would squat at the edge of the garden, watching the marching file of Gandhi and his ashramites, looking a little like something out of the Middle Ages, with the incongruous touch of the secretaries hurrying behind with shorthand note-books, and grieve for what would be a magnificent picture if I could ever get it.

The Mahatma had seen me around the place so much by now that he always had a friendly little remark for me, although we never actually conversed, and the occasional phrases he flung in my direction were always in the form of some tiny joke. He had his own pet name for me; whenever I appeared with my photographic machines he would say, 'There's the Torturer again.'

There was one morning when Gandhi walked in the volley-ball court beside the Bhangi Colony, and I had planted myself at one side opposite an opening between two tall trees. I had estimated that if Gandhi walked long enough for the sun at least to peep above the horizon, the first shaft of light would fall between these two trees. It was an excellent occasion for my photograph, for this day there were no outsiders. Flanking Gandhi in a soldierly rank were the key members of his ashram. Gandhi was leaning as usual on the shoulders of two women; this morning he had his grand-niece-in-law Abbha on the left and his attractive little granddaughter Sita on the right. His five shilling watch was swinging from his waist with each long energetic stride, and as he paced back and forth along the volley-ball court the sky grew brighter in the east.

During his last turn around the volley-ball court the first golden ray stole through the gap in the trees. As he streaked past me Gandhi chuckled, 'Now all your efforts will be in vain,' and the column of figures swept on and away. But he was wrong. I had kept two cameras with lenses of different focal lengths focussed on the crucial spot, and as he strode through the sunbeam I got two splendid negatives, one showing the entire rank with Gandhi and his followers, and the other a close-up of the Mahatma leaning on the shoulders of the two girls.

The group disappeared into the untouchable colony, where Gandhi would go to his cottage for his usual two hours of massage, administered daily by Sushila or one of the other women of the ashram.



When Delhi began dissolving in the steam of late spring, during those dreadful weeks when the plains are waiting for the monsoon, heroic efforts were made to complete the business of the cabinet conferences, but the debates dragged on with the format of freedom remaining nebulous and undefined. The moist heat that poured through buildings and over city streets seemed to collect in great stagnant pools through which politicians, ministers, and all living creatures moved gasping and sluggish. Finally the freedom talks were shifted to the purer, clearer air of the mountains and the entire political galaxy moved to the cool peaks of Simla, bordering the Himalayas.

Moving Gandhi and his ashram was an event in which many of us participated. Gandhi, believing as he did in the simple life, always travelled by third-class train. Ordinarily, to travel third-class in India you have to be strong enough to push your way into the train. Third-class cars are permanently in that condition which New York and London subways achieve only during the height of the rush hour. In addition travellers may cling to the roof or window-sills of the train. So, therefore, when Gandhi travelled third-class, a third-class car or group of cars was taken over for the Mahatma, for his ashramites, and for his goats. Since he had renounced cow's milk it was essential for the goats to go along on trips, and they also travelled third-class.

On the trip to Simla an entire third-class train was taken over for Gandhi, and we correspondents along with a handful of Congress Party leaders travelled on Gandhi's train. Since I happened to be the only woman correspondent travelling at that time, a small coffin-shaped compartment was slipped into place for me, and it was only later that night that I found the car just ahead of me held Nehru and the then president of the Congress Party, and the car immediately behind held Gandhi and his goats.

But at the end of ten days everybody came back, although Delhi was still like the inside of a blast furnace. Mr Jinnah had played his hard-to-get game so effectively in the hills that the negotiations had been deadlocked. The Delhi talks went on, with the principals shuttling between the Viceroy's Palace and the Bhangi Colony. Gandhi, whenever he stepped outside his hut, looked like a great white mushroom on legs, under the huge wet turkish towel he

wore heaped on his head and which kept constantly dripping, and Jinnah changed from impeccable grey to impeccable white linen suits. The blistering recriminations between Congress and the League, between Muslim and Hindu, that screamed from every newspaper and sounded from every platform, continued with growing heat. The one calm, steady voice was that of Gandhi, who despite his unfathomable, though often lovable, quirks about a host of other matters never lost sight of the main issue in this one. With the rising tide of religious and political controversy his country was heading toward grave danger, and he knew it. However, through it all, Jinnah, the cool Quaid-i-Azam, managed the game so adroitly that within months he had won his Pakistan.

Gandhi continued his prayer meetings in the cool of the evening, drawing crowds of such size that a large pavilion was erected at the edge of the untouchable colony where people who came to pray could sit and wait until the sun had set.

Often fifty or one hundred thousand came to prayers and listened while Gandhi discussed the subjects close to his heart. In addition to references to the key topic of independence, there were always little sermons on health and diet, on the beneficial effects of mudpacks for diseases afflicting both old and young, on the relative importance to peasants of the cow and the tractor. The cow could pull a plough, Gandhi never failed to point out, but there the similarity ended, for the cow could make things the tractor could not make: milk, ghee, and dung. And dung, he advised sensibly, should not only be used for fertilizer but—according to ancestral practice—be smeared on floors and doorsteps for its antiseptic properties.

The anti-machine references made at prayers always intrigued me, especially since these were delivered through a modern microphone, and when the talk was finished Gandhi would step off the prayer podium into Mr Birla's milk-white Packard car to be whirled back to the untouchable colony.

Mrs Naidu—famous for her witty tongue and warm heart—made a most celebrated remark about Gandhi, and it was spoken affectionately. 'If only Gandhiji knew how much it costs to keep him in poverty.'



## Chapter IX

### THE CREATOR OF PAKISTAN

LITTLE more than a year after Gandhi's sojourn in 'the Garden City of the Untouchables', as one reported called it, and after Jinnah had played will-o'-the-wisp to the Congress and the British negotiators, I called on the Jinnahs in their new palace home in Karachi.

Pakistan was one month old. Karachi was its swiftly spreading capital. On the sandy fringes of the city an enormous tent colony had grown up to house the influx of minor government officials. There was only one major government official, Mahomed Ali Jinnah, and there was no need for Jinnah to take to a tent. The huge marble and sandstone Government House, vacated by British officialdom, was waiting. The Quaid-i-Azam moved in, with his sister, Fatima, as hostess. Mr Jinnah had put on what his critics called his 'triple crown': he had made himself Governor-General; he was retaining the presidency of the Muslim League—now Pakistan's only political party; and he was president of the country's law-making body, the Constituent Assembly.

'We never expected to get it so soon,' Miss Fatima said when I called. 'We never expected to get it in our lifetimes.'

If Fatima's reaction was a glow of family pride, her brother's was a fever of ecstasy. Jinnah's deep-sunk eyes were pinpoints of excitement. His whole manner indicated that an almost overwhelming exaltation was racing through his veins. I had murmured some words of congratulation on his achievement in creating the world's largest Islamic nation.

'Oh, it's not just the largest *Islamic* nation. Pakistan is the fifth-largest nation in the world!'

The note of personal triumph was so unmistakable that I wondered how much thought he gave to the human cost: more Muslim lives had been sacrificed to create the new Muslim homeland than America, for example, had lost during the entire second World War. I hoped he had a constructive plan for the seventy million

citizens of Pakistan. What kind of constitution did he intend to draw up?

‘Of course it will be a democratic constitution; Islam is a democratic religion.’

I ventured to suggest that the term ‘democracy’ was often loosely used these days. Could he define what he had in mind?

‘Democracy is not just a new thing we are learning,’ said Jinnah. ‘It is in our blood. We have always had our system of *zakat*—our obligation to the poor.’

This confusion of democracy with charity troubled me. I begged him to be more specific.

‘Our Islamic ideas have been based on democracy and social justice since the thirteenth century.’

This mention of the thirteenth century troubled me still more. Pakistan has other relics of the Middle Ages besides ‘social justice’—the remnants of a feudal land system, for one. What would the new constitution do about that? The Koran, by which the transactions of Muslims have been regulated since the day of the Prophet, has been variously interpreted to indicate something close to totalitarianism or virtual Socialism. ‘The land belongs to God,’ says the Koran. This would need clarification in the constitution. Presumably Jinnah, the lawyer, would be just the person to correlate the ‘true Islamic principles’ one heard so much about in Pakistan with the new nation’s laws. But all he would tell me was that the constitution would be democratic because ‘the soil is perfectly fertile for democracy.’

What plans did he have for the industrial development of the country? Did he hope to enlist technical or financial assistance from America?

‘America needs Pakistan more than Pakistan needs America,’ was Jinnah’s reply. ‘Pakistan is the pivot of the world, as we are placed’—he revolved his long forefinger in bony circles—‘the frontier on which the future position of the world revolves.’ He leaned toward me, dropping his voice to a confidential note. ‘Russia,’ confided Mr Jinnah, ‘is not so very far away.’

This had a familiar ring. In Jinnah’s mind this brave new nation had no other claim on American friendship than this—that across a wild tumble of roadless mountain ranges lay the land of the



Bolsheviks. I wondered whether the Quaid-i-Azam considered his new state only as an armoured buffer between opposing major powers. He was stressing America's military interest in other parts of the world. 'America is now awakened,' he said with a satisfied smile. Since the United States was now bolstering up Greece and Turkey, she should be much more interested in pouring money and arms into Pakistan. 'If Russia walks in here,' he concluded, 'the whole world is menaced.'

In the weeks to come I was to hear the Quaid-i-Azam's thesis echoed by government officials throughout Pakistan. 'Surely America will build up our army,' they would say to me. 'Surely America will give us loans to keep Russia from walking in.' But when I asked whether there were any signs of Russian infiltration, they would reply almost sadly, as though sorry not to be able to make more of the argument. 'No, Russia has shown no signs of being interested in Pakistan.'

This hope of tapping the U.S. Treasury was voiced so persistently that one wondered whether the purpose was to bolster the world against Bolshevism or to bolster Pakistan's own uncertain position as a new political entity. Actually, I think, it was more nearly related to the even more significant bankruptcy of ideas in the new Muslim state—a nation drawing its spurious warmth from the embers of an antique religious fanaticism fanned into a new blaze.

Jinnah's most frequently used technique in the struggle for his new nation had been the playing of opponent against opponent. Evidently this technique was now to be extended into foreign policy. Not only the tension between the great powers but the Palestine situation as well held opportunities for profiting from the disputes of others. Pakistan was occupied with her own grave internal problem, but she still found time to talk fervently, though vaguely, of sending 'a liberation army to Palestine to help the Arabs free the Holy Land from the Jews'. Muslim divines began advocating that trained ex-servicemen be dispatched in this holy cause. *Dawn*, the official government newspaper, condemned the 'Jewish State' and urged a united front of Muslim countries in the military as well as the spiritual sense. 'That way lies the salvation of Islam,' said one editorial.

No one would have been more astonished than Jinnah if he could have foreseen thirty or forty years earlier that anyone would ever speak of him as a 'saviour of Islam'. In those days any talk of religion brought a cynical smile. He condemned those who talked in terms of religious rivalries, and in the stirring period when the crusade for freedom began sweeping the country he was hailed as 'the embodied symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity'. The gifted Congresswoman, Mrs Naidu, one of Jinnah's closest friends, wrote poems extolling his role as the great unifier in the fight for independence. 'Perchance it is written in the book of the future', ran one of her tributes, 'that he, in some terrible crisis of our national struggle, will pass into immortality' as the hero of 'the Indian liberation'.

In the 'terrible crisis', Mahomed Ali Jinnah was to pass into immortality, not as the ambassador of unity, but as the deliberate apostle of discord. What caused this spectacular renunciation of the concept of a united India, to which he had dedicated the greater part of his life? No one knows exactly. The immediate occasion for the break, in the mid-thirties, was his opposition to Gandhi's civil disobedience programme. Nehru says that Jinnah 'disliked the crowds of ill-dressed people who filled the Congress' and was not at home with the new spirit rising among the common people under Gandhi's magnetic leadership. Others say it was against his legal conscience to accept Gandhi's programme. One thing is certain: the break with Gandhi, Nehru, and the other Congress leaders was not caused by any Hindu-Muslim issue.

In any case, Jinnah revived the moribund Muslim League in 1936 after it had dragged through an anaemic thirty years' existence, and took to the religious platform. He began dinning into the ears of millions of Muslims the claim that they were down-trodden solely because of Hindu domination. During the years directly preceding this move on his part, an unprecedented degree of unity had developed between Muslims and Hindus in their struggle for independence—a unity disrupted by the old divide-and-rule tactics under the British Raj. Certain highly placed Indians also feared unity, dreading a popular movement which would threaten their special position. Then another decisive factor arose. Although Hindus had always been ahead of Muslims in the in-



dustrial sphere, the great Muslim feudal landlords now had aspirations toward industry. From these wealthy Muslims, who resented the well-established Hindu competition, Jinnah drew his powerful supporters. One wonders whether Jinnah was fighting to free downtrodden Muslims from domination or merely to gain an earmarked area, free from competition, for this small and wealthy clan.

The trend of events in Pakistan would support the theory that Jinnah carried the banner of the Muslim landed aristocracy, rather than that of the Muslim masses he claimed to champion. There was no hint of personal material gain in this. Jinnah was known to be personally incorruptible, a virtue which gave him a great strength with both poor and rich. The drive for personal wealth played no part in his politics. It was a drive for power.

It would be interesting to know why this enigmatic man, successful, influential, and highly respected, should suddenly turn away from all of his early political aims and companions, and embark on this lonely road. Some who knew him best attribute this break with his past to the loss of a loved wife. Jinnah's vivacious and handsome young wife, who died when he was at the height of his Congress career, has become a woman of legend.

Actually there were two wives, but the first is seldom mentioned. She died when still a bride, and, incredible as this may seem to Western readers, Jinnah never saw her. The wedding took place when he was a student; according to orthodox Muslim custom, the girl was represented at the ceremony by her male relatives. Then the youthful bridegroom went to London to complete his studies, and before he returned his wife had died.

In contrast to the total orthodoxy of the first marriage, the second was completely against convention. Jinnah's new wife was not a Muslim but a Parsee. The wedding was not arranged by the parents; it was a love match. And far from taking to wife a woman he had never seen, Jinnah had been the first man, apart from her father, to behold her on the day of her birth.

This glimpse of his future bride occurred when Jinnah was calling at the home of his close friend, Sir Dinshaw Petit, a wealthy Bombay business man. The baby was born just as he entered the house, and Sir Dinshaw, placing the infant in Jinnah's arms, said,

'You shall be the first to hold my daughter.' When the daughter was eighteen, Jinnah, then in his forties, proposed to her.

The second Mrs Jinnah must have been a spirited and unpredictable young woman. Everything about her was in defiance of tradition. She used make-up at a time when no one but a professional actress dared be caught with a powder puff. While wives of many highly placed Muslims appeared in public only with faces veiled and bodies shrouded in tentlike garments, Mrs Jinnah went about in such gossamer-thin saris that they were, and still are, the talk of the town.

The stories that have been handed down of Jinnah's attitude toward his young bride reveal a curious mixture of devotion and formality. She spoke complainingly to friends of his custom of signing his love letters 'M. A. Jinnah'. Another custom of his, of which she did not complain, was to leave a hundred-rupee note every morning on her pillow.

Once when Jinnah was making an important speech opposing the British military budget, his followers packed the hall to hear what they knew would be a brilliant presentation. Jinnah was well launched on his case, every eye focussed on him, when Mrs Jinnah entered the Distinguished Visitors' Gallery and settled herself in the front row. She extracted a lipstick from her handbag and, leaning far over the railing in her diaphanous garments, began rouging her lips. His friends, I was told by a woman who was there, were 'all so sorry for him'. On another occasion Jinnah was consulting with some Muslim *maulanas*, learned holy men in fezzes and long beards, when Mrs Jinnah, dressed as usual, joined the group. Mrs Naidu, who was present, stepped up quietly and wrapped a heavy woollen shawl about Mrs Jinnah's shoulders.

Jinnah's married life sped to swift tragedy. Shortly after his wife had given birth to a baby, she left him, and before he was able to bring about a reconciliation, she died of peritonitis. Wounded by the public humiliation of her desertion, then overwhelmed at the sudden death of this beloved and spirited woman, he withdrew deeply into himself, nursing his bitterness. His isolation, both personal and political, increased.

Jinnah's wife had been an ardent nationalist. The removal of her influence may well have twisted his future course. But I



## PAKISTAN: LAND OF THE PURE



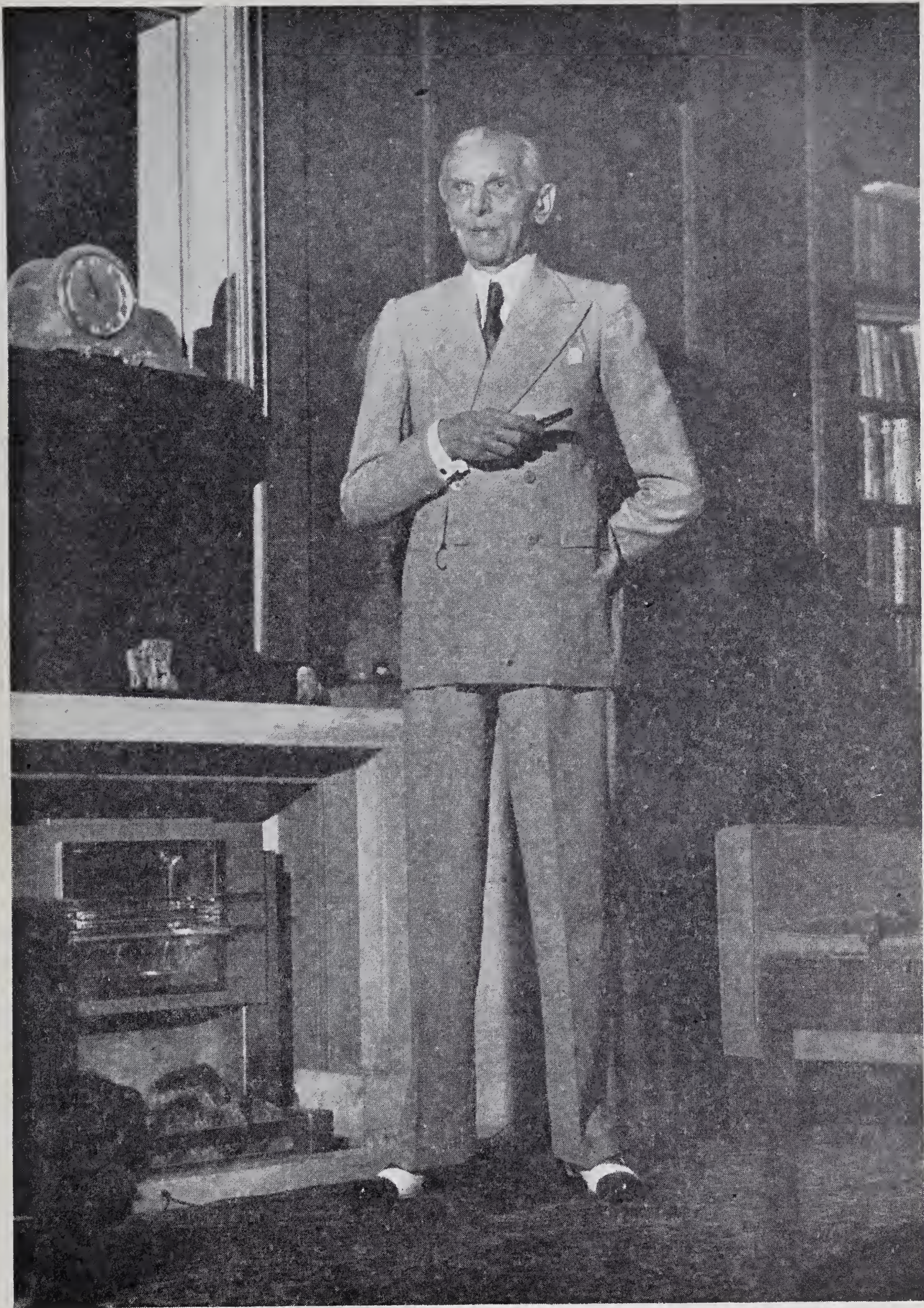
*Women may not pray with men, but are permitted to stand in the rear.*





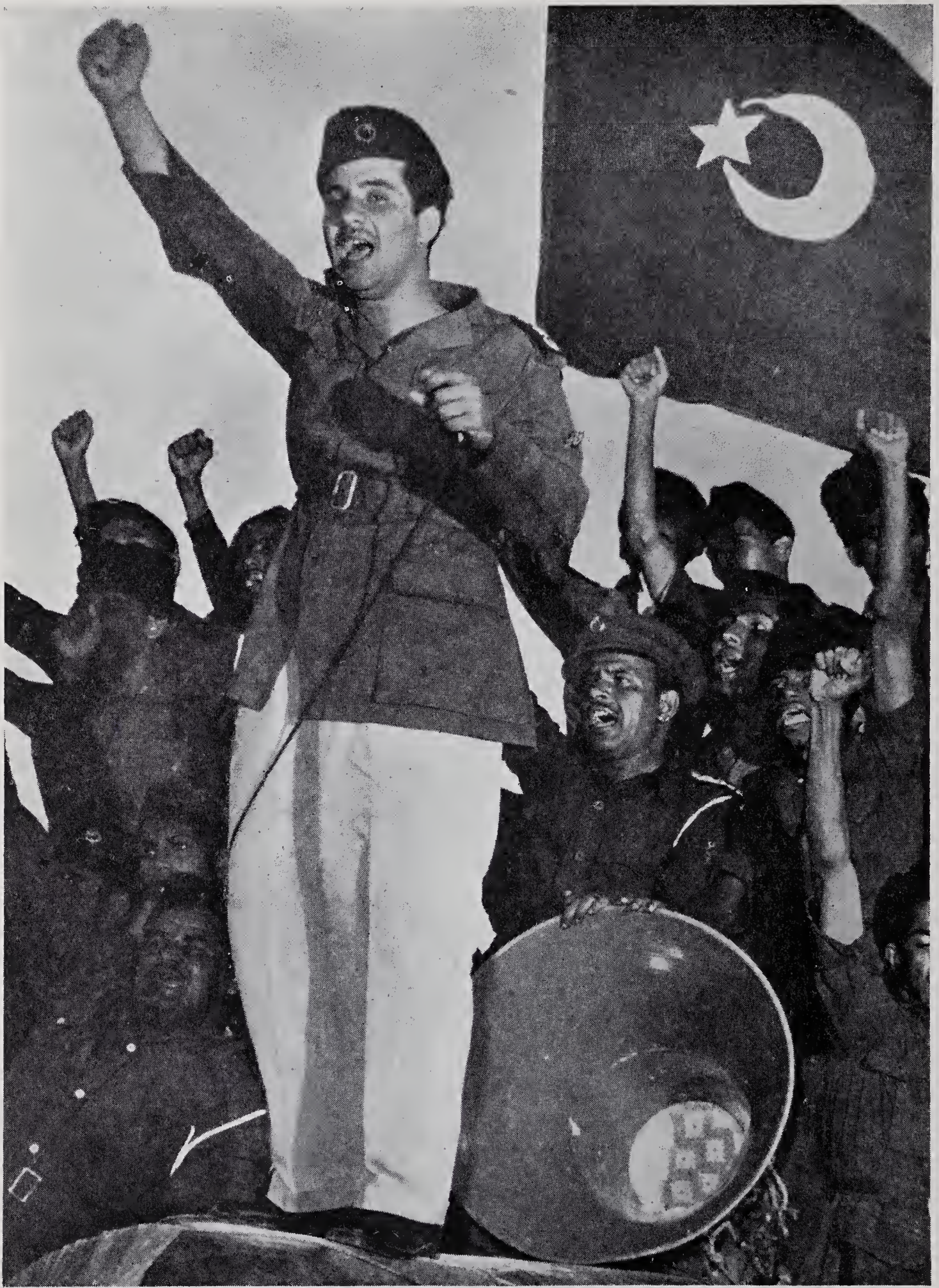
*Jinnah—facing east.*





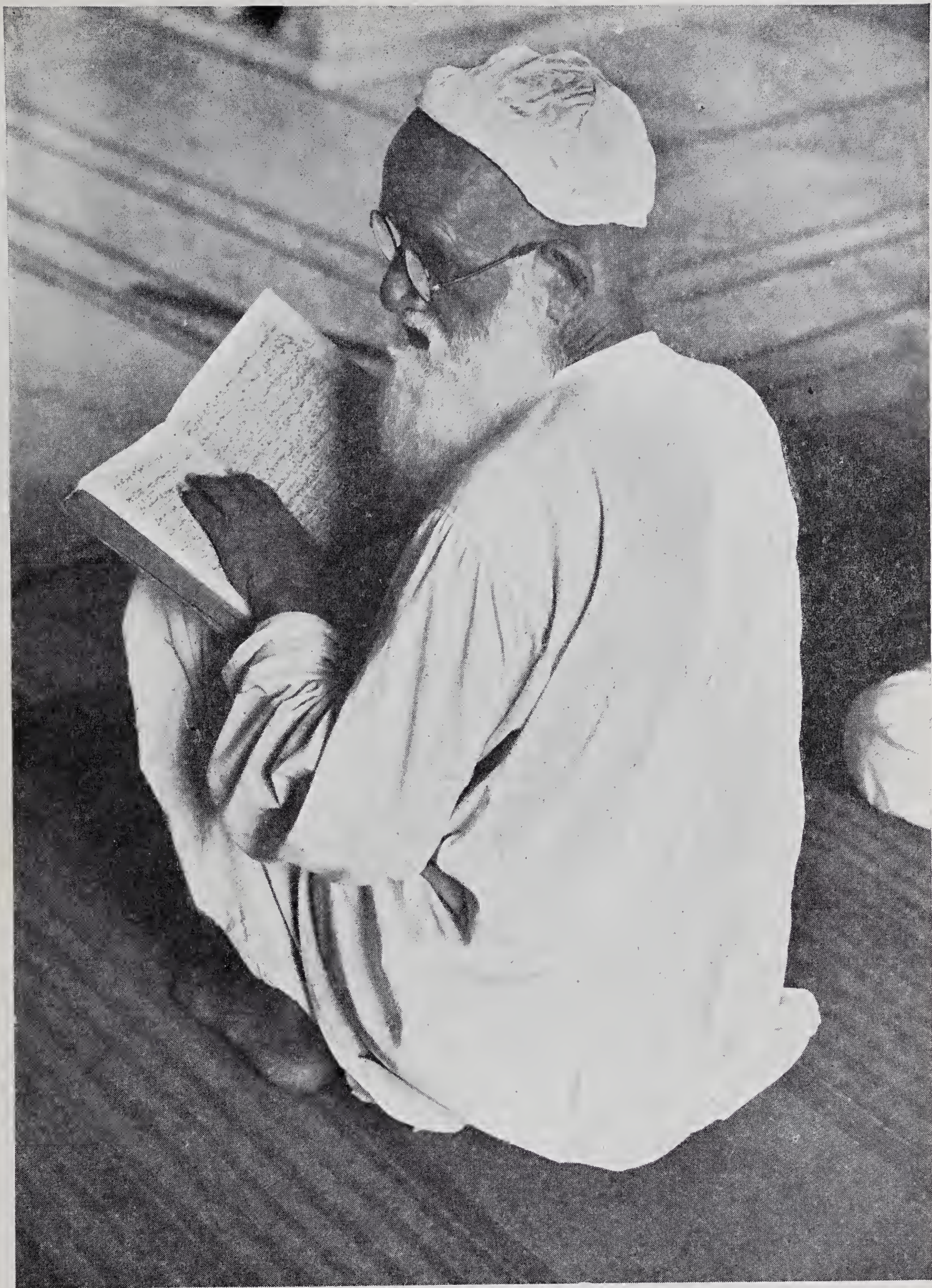
*Jinnah—facing west.*





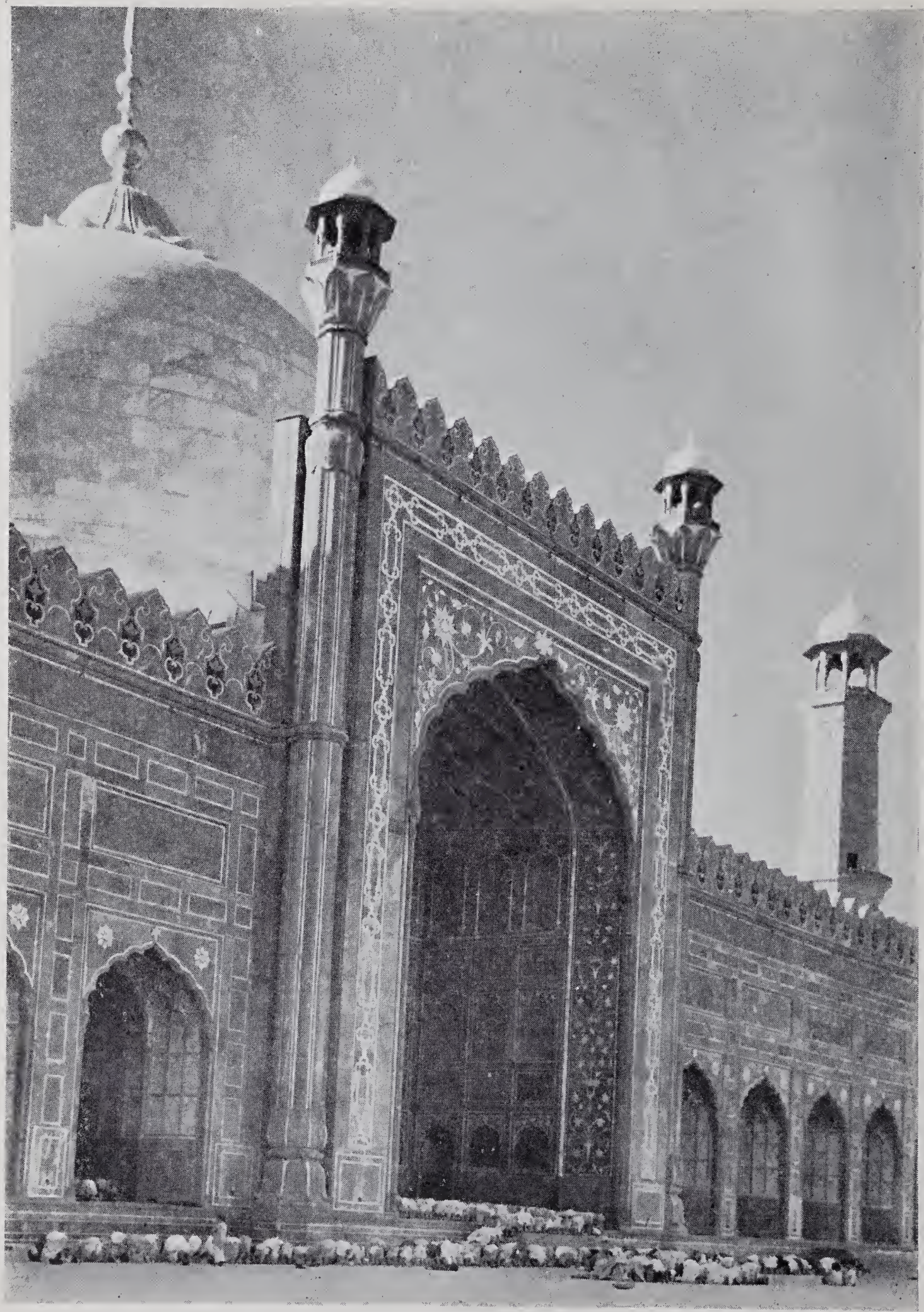
*Said Haroon addressing a Young Muslim League meeting.*





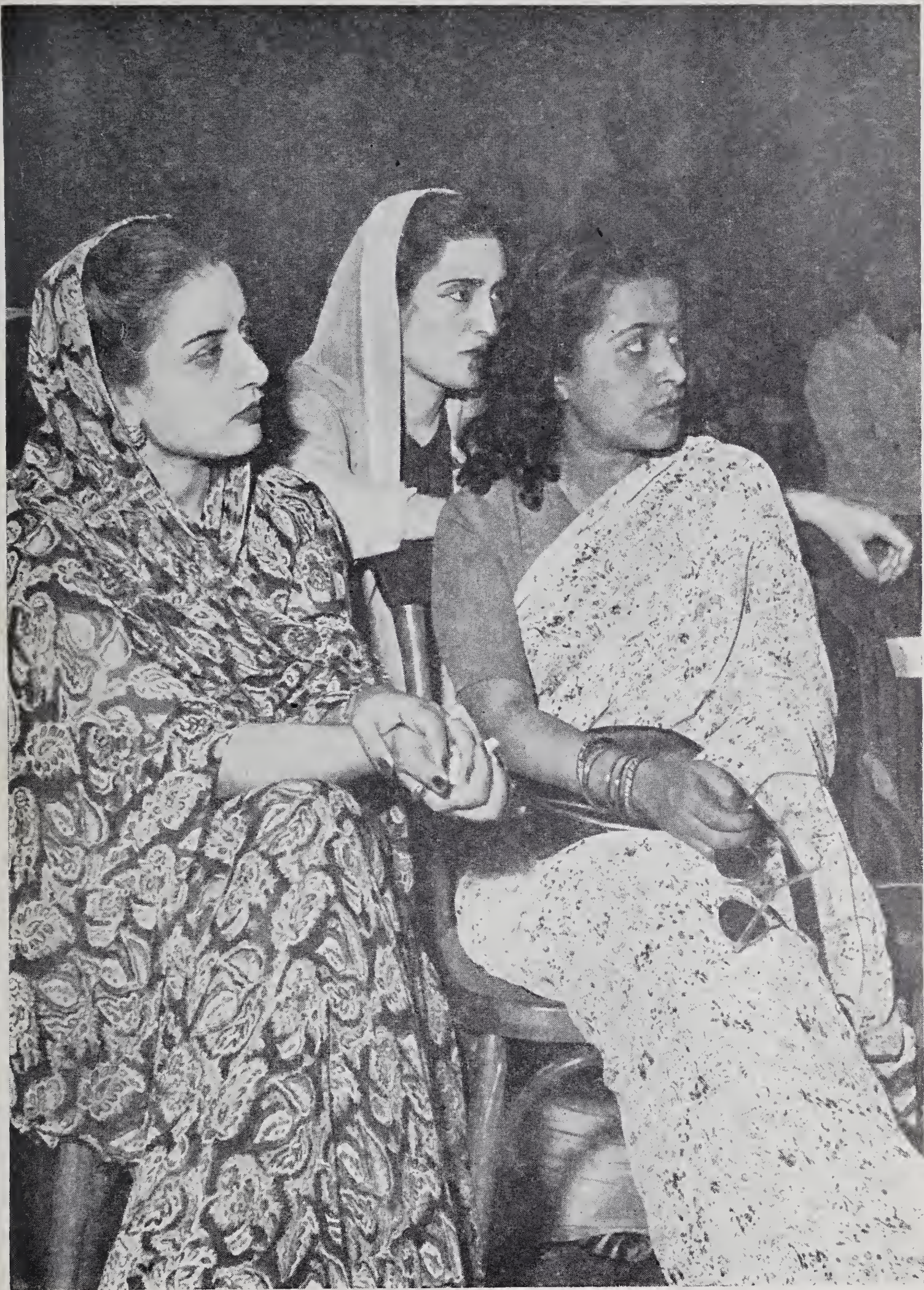
*Muslim scholar.*





*The Shahi Mosque in Lahore is the biggest in India. The Friday sermons are carried into the courtyard by loudspeakers.*





*The feminine impedimenta of Muslim orthodoxy do not apply to these wives of Muslim League leaders.*

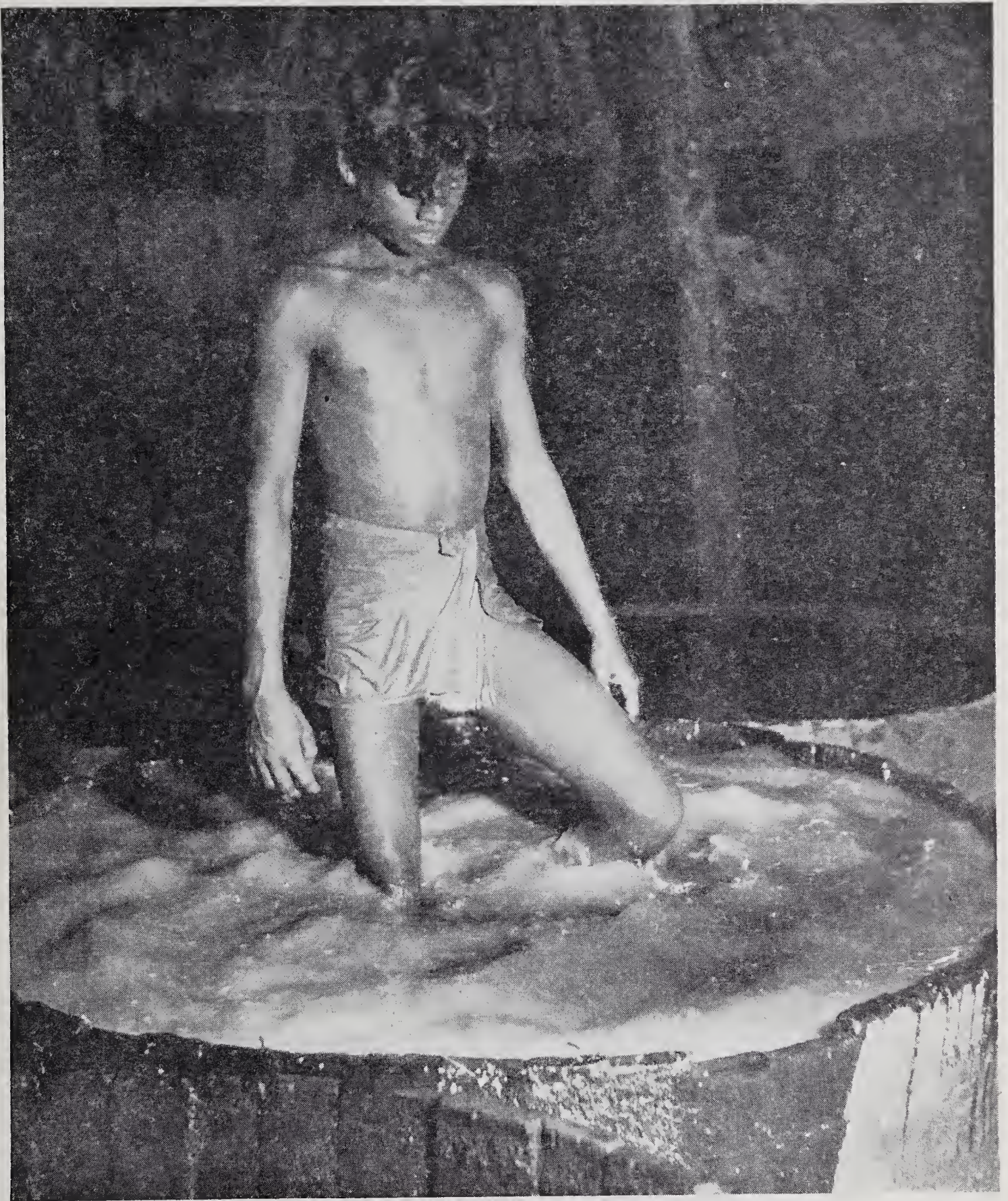




*Mir George Alimurad Khan Talpur, the boy ruler of Khaipur.*

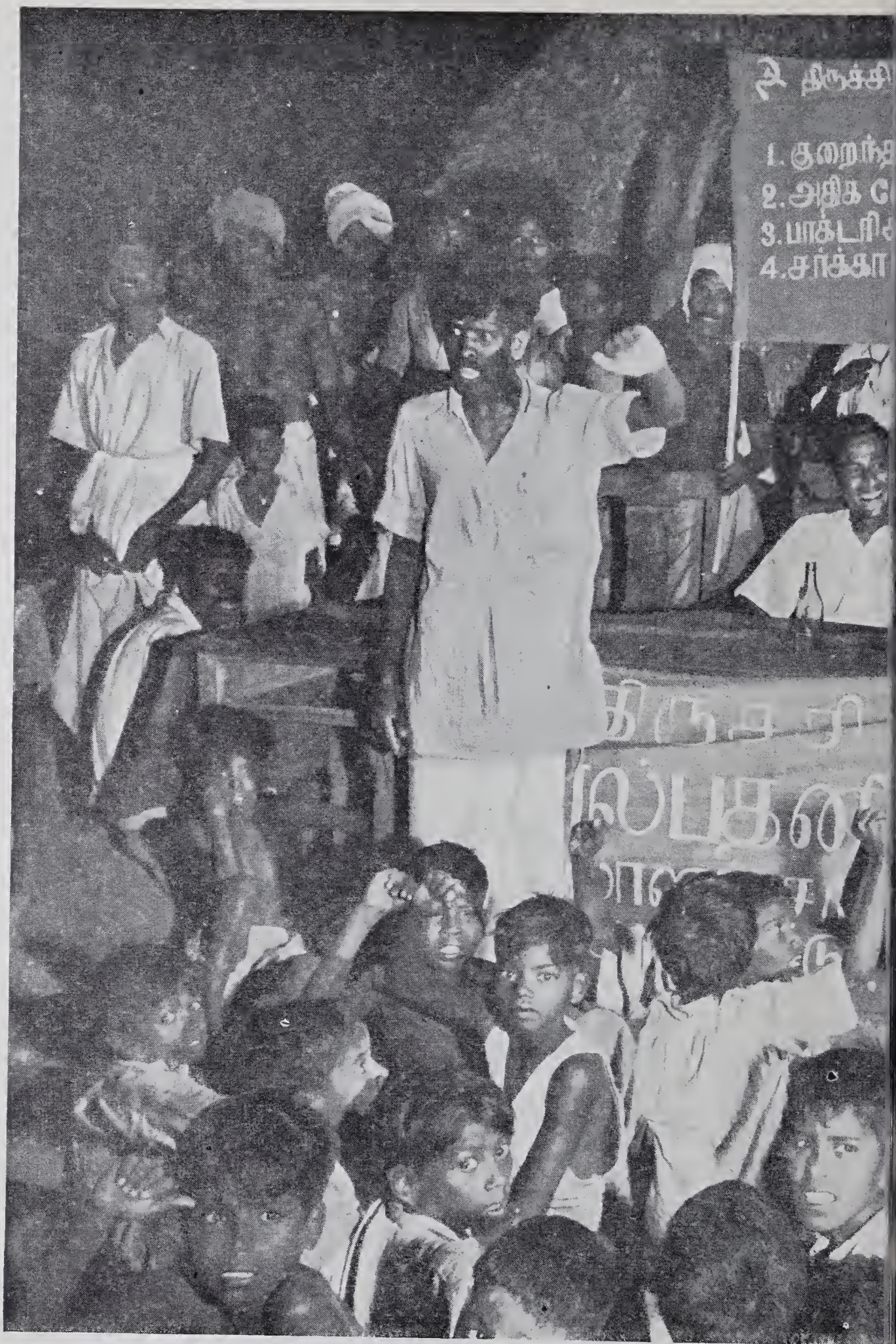


## UNTOUCHABLES



*Untouchable boy treading hides in a lime vat. Unless he washes every fifteen minutes with a neutralizing agent the strong solution eats away the flesh.*





*Tannery union meeting. The union demands written on the banner are:  
3. One day off a week; 4. Cost of living allowance.*





1. Minimum wage of thirty shillings a month; 2. Extra pay for over-time;





*Whole families work as a unit in the tannery pits.*





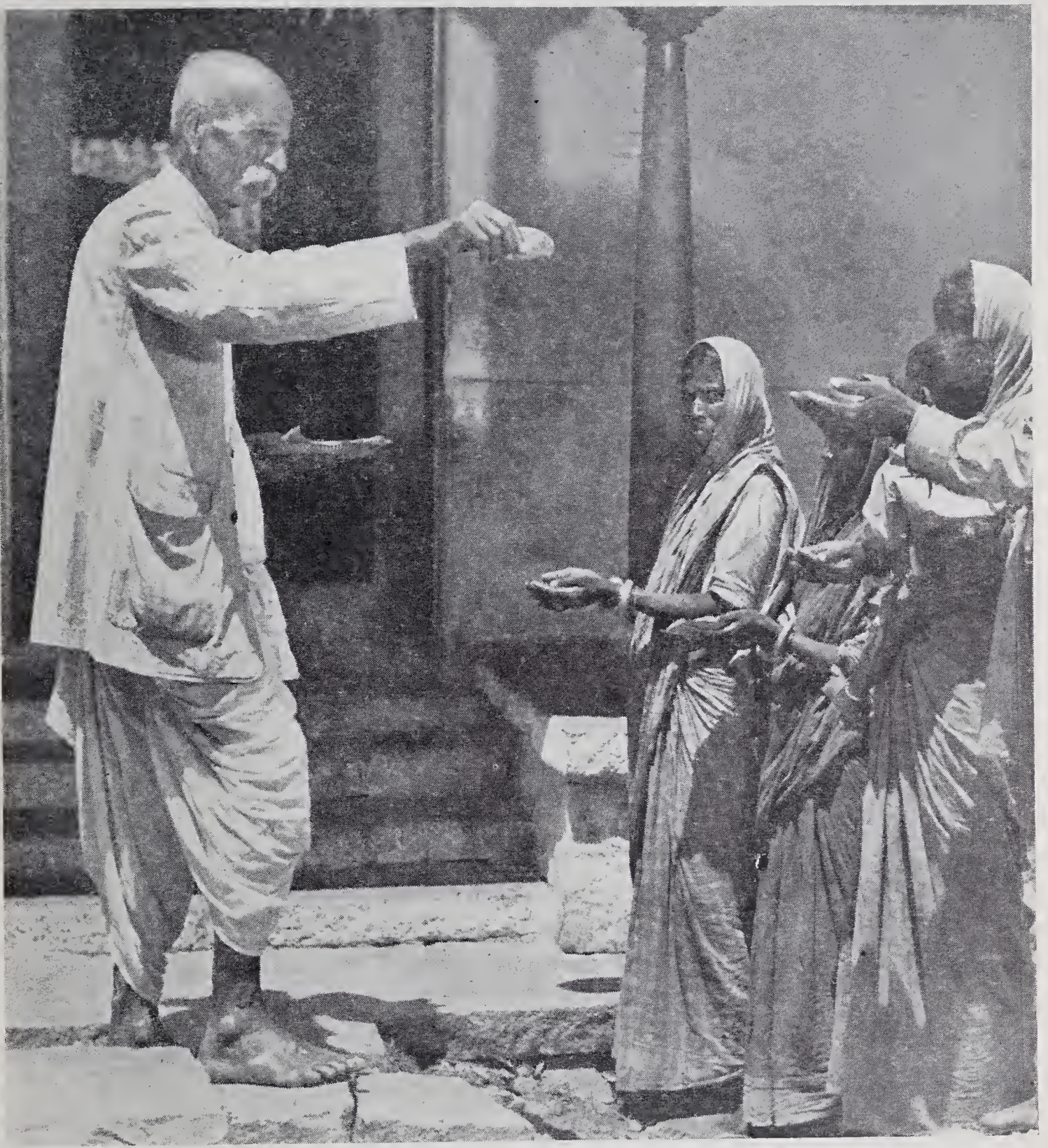
*Many untouchables turn to Christianity or Mohammedanism because these faiths have no caste system. Christian untouchables, however, have tended to become merely a subcaste within the great untouchable group.*





*Untouchable women fall on their hands and knees before the village headman. There are over forty million casteless Indians.*





*The wages of untouchables are wrapped in a leaf and dropped from a safe distance into their hands.*





*Untouchable's wedding. The regalia is handed down within the families from generation to generation. Their wedding garments are knotted together, a symbolism typical of such a ceremony.*



believe the key to his break with his past was this deep personal wound. He could no longer bear to face those friends who had been 'so sorry for him'. Embittered and proud, he started down his lonely road. As a Muslim nationalist he could look forward only to being one of the crowd—the same old Congress crowd. As the Quaid-i-Azam, the Great Leader of Muslims, who could tell what might be in store, to what glories he could climb?

From his daughter Jinnah exacted an Islamic conformity which he had never practised himself. When lively little Dina eloped with a Parsee who had turned Christian—following the precedent for marriage to a non-Muslim set by her father—Jinnah disowned her. One woman remained at his side: his sister Fatima, who had given up her work as a dentist to keep house for him. A spinster, and an introvert like her brother, she resented the presence of any other woman. Only once did Dina break through the barrier. When Jinnah was wounded in an attempted assassination by a young Muslim, his daughter rushed to his bedside. The wound was not serious; Dina was not welcomed; and after that brief visit she was never permitted to return.

After this interlude brother and sister returned to their bleak, self-centred existence, until the march of events landed them in the monumental sandstone Government House in Karachi, where I found them after Independence Day.

I had known Miss Fatima in pre-Pakistan days. She had seemed such a shy and reticent woman that I was impressed by the smoothness with which she had glided into her role as first lady of Pakistan. With the birth of her brother's nation she had flowered forth in a kind of ghostly bloom. She addressed meetings, laid cornerstones, whirled about in a monogrammed limousine with attendants in Pakistan-green livery, her personal pennant fluttering from the hood. Lahore's famous rose gardens were rechristened, in her honour, 'Gulistan-i-Fatima'. The substantial monument of Queen Victoria, which had graced a public square in Sind during many years of the British Raj, was hoisted from its foundations and replaced by a slimmer sculpture representing the wraithlike Miss Jinnah. Fatima, who was as grey as her seventy-two-year-old brother, although perhaps fifteen or twenty years younger, had adopted his trick of matching grey clothes to grey hair. Scarves



and veilings in palest lavender, grey, and off-white shades drifted everywhere about her except over her face. On the subject of 'opening the face', as Muslims call it, she took a completely modern stand.

Reverence for the Jinnahs had almost reached the peak of worship, and had been carefully nurtured in press and radio. Nevertheless, the modern ideas of this pair were not accepted by the orthodox without reservations. Jinnah had never troubled to make his holy pilgrimage to Mecca and, Islamic injunction notwithstanding, sipped an occasional glass of wine and smoked endless cigars. His sister's boldness in 'opening the face' brought bitter criticism from the pious.

At one huge rally, when Pakistan was new and the couple were at the height of their popularity, they sat enthroned on a dais receiving the thundering tributes of the crowd. The welcoming address was delivered by a bearded *maulana*, a holy man who spoke in Urdu, the people's language. The Westernized Jinnah couple had never bothered to master Urdu. Throughout the scholarly address, the Quaid-i-Azam and his sister sat bowing and smiling, mercifully unconscious of the blistering attack the holy man was making on unveiled women.

Less than three months after Pakistan became a nation, Jinnah's Olympian assurance had strangely withered. His altered condition was not made public. 'The Quaid-i-Azam has a bad cold' was the answer given to inquiries.

Only those closest to him knew that the 'cold' was accompanied by paralyzing inability to make even the smallest decisions, by sullen silences striped with outbursts of irritation, by a spiritual numbness concealing something close to panic underneath. I knew it only because I spent most of this trying period at Government House, attempting to take a new portrait of Jinnah for a *Life* cover.

The Quaid-i-Azam was still revered as a messiah and deliverer by most of his people. But the 'Great Leader' himself could not fail to know that all was not well in his new creation, the nation his critics referred to as the 'House that Jinnah built'. The separation from the main body of India had been in many ways an unrealistic one. Pakistan grew 75 per cent of the world's jute supply; the processing mills were all in India. Pakistan raised one-



third of the cotton of India, but it had only one-thirtieth of the cotton mills. Although it produced the bulk of Indian skins and hides, all the leather tanneries were in South India. The new state had no paper mills, few iron foundries. Rail and road facilities, insufficient at best, were still choked with refugees. Pakistan has a superbly fertile soil, and its outstanding advantage is self-sufficiency in food, but this was threatened by the never-ending flood of refugees who continued pouring in long after the peak of the religious wars had passed.

With his burning devotion to his separate Islamic nation, Jinnah had taken all these formidable obstacles in his stride. But the blow that finally broke his spirit was the crisis over Kashmir.

Kashmir, India's largest princely state, despite its 77 per cent Muslim population, had not fallen into the arms of Pakistan by the sheer weight of religious majority. Kashmir had acceded to India, and was now the scene of an undeclared war between the two nations. With the beginning of this torturing anxiety, the Quaid-i-Azam's siege of bad colds began, and then his dismaying withdrawal into himself.

During this period, when Jinnah was not seeing even his ministers and when his intimidated palace staff and aides-de-camp dreaded crossing him in the smallest matter, Miss Fatima—after repeated and baffling postponements—won his consent to be photographed. He finally agreed, I suspect, because the Quaid-i-Azam, even at seventy-two, was still dramatically handsome and as fond as any good-looking man of having his picture taken.

I was shocked at Jinnah's changed appearance—the unsteady step, listless eyes, the white-knuckled, nervously clenched hands. As I went ahead with my pictures, Miss Fatima, with sisterly solicitude, slipped up before each shot and tried gently to uncurl the desperately clenched hands.

I think that the tortured appearance of Mr Jinnah was an indication that, in these final months of his life, he was adding up his own balance sheet. Analytical, brilliant, and no bigot, he knew what he had done. Like Doctor Faustus, he had made a bargain from which he could never be free. During the heat of the struggle he had been willing to call on all the devilish forces of superstition, and now that his new nation had been achieved the bigots were



in the position of authority. The leaders of orthodoxy and a few 'old families' had the final word and, to perpetuate their power, were seeing to it that the people were held in the deadening grip of religious superstition.

But other, healthier forces were at work in the new nation, although fighting against great odds. I met many officials, particularly those closest to land and peasant problems, who were working for agrarian reform.

Despite calamities great enough to rock a stronger nation to its foundations, Pakistan came through its first year better than expected, with a balanced budget, a favourable trade balance, and a bright programme for industrial development. Generation of hydro-electric power was to have first priority. Cotton mills were to be expanded within ten years by two and a half million spindles. The first fifty thousand of these were promised by Japan. Plans were made for cement factories, leather processing, pharmaceuticals, a rubber-tyre plant, paper mills, and manufacture of farm implements and cutting tools. A major American motor manufacturer is establishing a factory in Pakistan.

The return of normal co-operation between the twin dominions, whose economy is so closely linked, would help both, but especially smaller Pakistan. But a reuniting of the two countries is highly unlikely. As one Pakistan official expressed it to me, Pakistan is 'ready and willing to have the friendliest possible co-operation with India, a relationship like that between the United States and Canada, but an amalgamation in the sense that both the territories would be governed as a single state, by a single constitution, is unthinkable.'

Several great Muslim industrial families, freed from the competition of the Hindu business magnates who dominate industry in India, are probably quite content with a separate Pakistan. One of the most venerable is the Ishpahani family, whose interests have for more than a century reached through the Muslim world from India to the Middle East. The name of Ishpahani is virtually synonymous with jute, the 'golden fibre of Bengal', and a principal product of East Pakistan. The Habibs, greatest Muslim bankers on the Indian sub-continent, and the military contractors Amjad Ali and Wasir Ali were all staunch supporters of Jinnah



and now find undeveloped Pakistan a mine of opportunity. One of the most active families, industrially and politically, are the Haroons—a leading family of the Province of Sind, who had much to do with making the new nation a reality. Not an 'old family' in the sense of ancient lineage, the Haroons possess vitality, business shrewdness, and great wealth.

Sir Abdoola Haroon, his widow relates, had begun working for Pakistan even before Jinnah had adopted the separate-nation theory. In the late twenties Sir Abdoola, a self-made sugar magnate, had broken away from the 'Hindu-dominated Congress' and resolved that the Muslim League must be strengthened. Jinnah who was Haroon's close friend, took the helm of the League some years later, and the Quaid-i-Azam held for a time to the concept of a united India, while Haroon argued for a separate Pakistan. Eventually Jinnah had swung to this view and launched the crusade for Pakistan. Five years before the goal was reached Sir Abdoola died. Jinnah told Lady Haroon: 'I have lost not only a friend but my right hand.'

The torch that had been raised by Sir Abdoola was loyally grasped by his entire family, and in the new nation the numerous Haroons took leadership in every conceivable political and commercial field. Lady Haroon, who headed the sugar syndicate, also took over her husband's profitable second-hand clothing business, importing old clothes from America and having them cleaned and mended in her factory before re-sale. Yusuf, the eldest son, became president of the Muslim Chamber of Commerce, served a term as mayor of Karachi, was recently made Premier of Sind, published Jinnah's newspaper *Dawn*, imported textiles and toys, laid plans for varied manufacturing enterprises, and has started a new air line—Pak-Air.

The Haroons' pink stucco manor in Karachi, named Seafeld, boasted an elevator, glassed-in verandas, quantities of modernistic furniture, endless sitting rooms, and handsomely mirrored boudoirs. The house was constantly buzzing with the numerous Haroon women—at the telephones, organizing refugee relief committees, drilling with flags and lathees on the great flat rooftop, and designing saris. Over it all Lady Haroon presided as matriarch, motherly but imperious.



## Chapter X

### CASTE, CUSTOM, AND LAW

WHAT a woman needs to know, according to the definition given me, is about all most Muslim girls are able to know about a man before they marry.

So that their daughters will not be marrying complete strangers, many Muslim families arrange a meeting one month before the wedding at which the boy and girl, formidably chaperoned, confront one another. The girl appears unveiled, and if the prospective groom finds her too unattractive he may object. The girl has equal rights and, if she possesses rare courage, may also speak out in protest. The Koran upholds her right not to be married without her consent, and nothing in Islamic doctrine forbids the betrothed this swift premarital meeting. In some circles, as among the wealthy Muslim families of Hyderabad, custom is more rigid than religion and does not permit this brief inspection. Unless the betrothed are relatives, which frequently happens in high society, and have played together as children until the little girl was placed in *purdah*, the bride and groom will see each other's faces for the first time on their wedding day.

In Hyderabad I had a chance to witness this dramatic moment of *jalva*, or 'seeing', when bride and groom catch the first glimpse of one another's faces. I was with the schoolgirl friends of the bride, and we all drove to the wedding in a 'purdah limousine'. Discreetly hidden behind yellow silk curtains, we could peer out at the male guests as they arrived. This was a very fashionable wedding: cars full of men swept up to the front door, while *purdah* cars were shunted back through the garden, where the ladies could disembark at the *purdah* gate.

Inside, hundreds of women sat on the floor, dressed in brilliant saris of clear yellow, vivid cobalt, burning cerise and coral. They were chattering excitedly, and climbing over one another to talk with friends. Their trailing draperies, floating scarves, and diaphanous appendages made it seem as though I had entered a room



full of oversized sea anemones. The jewels they wore were almost beyond belief: ropes of pearls in descending tiers covering the entire front of a sari; rows of glittering bangles encircling an arm from wrist to elbow; five-inch tassel-shaped earrings of threaded sapphires and diamonds swinging from the ear lobes. The enormous, elaborately wrought *tika*, which a woman puts on first at her own wedding and thereafter may wear to the weddings of others, hung like a third eye on the forehead of many of the guests.

The bride's mother made her way to me through the bedlam and led me upstairs and into a bedroom. I discovered that I was being offered a privilege granted only to relatives and closest friends—I was to see the bride. On a red-draped bed, covered with a tangle of red-and-gold-striped saris, was a bulging lump. The mother lifted up a handful of veiling; there lay a very pretty little girl who could have been no older than fourteen. Her lips were stained with the ceremonial black dye that only married women may wear; her face was framed in pearl ornaments. Her eyes were closed.

'What is the trouble?' I asked. 'Is she ill?'

'Oh, no. She just has to keep her eyes closed for several days while the ceremonies are going on.'

I wasn't sure I had heard correctly in the din of conversation around us: 'For several days?'

'Yes, only a few days! Not for weeks before the wedding as it used to be in olden times. We're a modern family, and our little daughter has been in school. We wanted to give her a chance to finish her examinations before the ceremonies started.' She replaced the saris over the face and we started downstairs.

There I found a new and electric expectancy among the women. The suspense was almost unbearable. The bridegroom was coming. These hundreds of women would remain unveiled when he came, and this would be perhaps the only time in his life that the young man would have the chance to look into the faces of so many women. A girl next to me whispered, 'He's supposed to be allowed to do *anything* he wants to. We have a saying in Hyderabad that the groom is allowed seven murders on his wedding night.'

In the next moment the bridegroom was in the room, a nice-



enough-looking young man, with an agreeable face and jaunty moustache. But all I could notice was his extraordinary costume. Covering his head, shoulders, and torso like a suit of chain mail was a tightly woven garment made entirely of tuberoses. 'He must be feeling foolish,' whispered the girl next to me. 'I always tell my brothers that no one could make me look foolish like this.' The groom flashed a sheepish smile in the direction of his admiring female audience and clambered up on a bed directly in the middle of the room. This, like the one upstairs, was a red bed. As the groom settled down cross-legged on one end of it, his aunt, fluttering about like a nervous little hen in her stiff brocade, hopped up on the bed beside her nephew. Waving a diamond-studded fan in his perspiring face, she called out: 'Bring the bride quickly.'

The bride was brought, but not quickly. The relatives who carried her were staggering under their precious load, now swathed in so much gold and red veiling and so encircled with flower garlands that I wondered whether anybody would be able to find the girl inside. The inert mass was deposited on the red bed, and the bride and groom began to play the sugar game. A tray with lumps of sugar was brought to the edge of the bed, and the bride, unseeing, groped for a lump. The groom tried to bite it out of her fingers, but each time he reached out the bride's relatives snatched her hand back, a manoeuvre which was greeted with peals of merriment from the roomful of women. Sugar was strewn all over the floor, and the onlookers were reduced to helpless laughter before the groom managed to bite the sugar out of the bride's fingers and swallow it. A sigh of satisfaction swept the room. This was a good omen; the groom had eaten something sweet.

Now the ceremony of *jalva* was at hand. A heavily jewelled mirror was brought to the bedside, a rather battered one which doubtless had been serving this function for generations. The venerable little looking glass was placed on the bed between bride and groom; the tangle of flower garlands was held aside by the relatives of both families. The girl remained veiled, but presumably the boy was able to look down into the mirror, up under the mist of red and gold, and catch his first glimpse of his wife's face.

'Forgive this impertinent question,' I whispered to the Indian



friend at my side, 'but when do they finally get into a bed together?'

'After three more days of ceremonies,' she said.

I had a plane to catch and couldn't wait. But I learned that when that night arrived, the women relatives of the groom would accompany him into the bedroom and remain for two hours, telling jokes to help him feel at home with the strange woman he had married.

The arranging of marriages for their children is such a grave and complicated duty for orthodox parents, both Hindu and Muslim, that they consult higher authority for guidance. Muslims go to that omnibook of information, the Koran. Hindus go still higher—to the stars. For the Hindus, a marriage can be unmade as well as made in heaven. After the groom's family and the bride's family have agreed, the stars will often disagree.

Astrologers, who act as middlemen during celestial consultations, have told me that 55 per cent of the parents who come to them for advice will find the stars approve the match they have in mind. The rest must search farther for a candidate with a suitable horoscope.

In addition to celestial configurations, Hindu parents trying to marry off their daughters and sons have for centuries been limited in their choice by the caste system. This is an exclusively Hindu problem, since Islam denies caste distinctions, but until the new Indian constitution was framed, marriage between members of different castes or sub-castes was contrary to law.

India has some forty-eight hundred castes and sub-castes; some are such tiny sub-sects that within them partners of suitable age may be difficult to find. Within a metalworker's caste, iron smelters differ in sub-caste from ironsmiths, coppersmiths from tin-smiths. Within a huntsman's caste, if conformity were strict, the son of a birdcatcher would not marry the daughter of a 'collector of honey'. Among the exalted Brahmins—at the top of the caste ladder—1,886 separate sects are on record, many of whose members would not intermarry with one another, much less marry beneath them.

Under the new laws of independent India, this caste conformity is beginning to break down. A man and woman of different caste



may now obtain a civil marriage without being compelled to affirm that they 'have no faith in the Hindu religion', as was necessary in the past, when only 'sacramental' marriage performed according to Hindu scriptural rites was recognized under the Hindu Code.

To-day if, on caste grounds, an orthodox father forbids his daughter to marry or chooses someone for her whom she does not want to marry, the courts will uphold her right to make her own choice. Custom, naturally, lags behind law. While a modern couple from enlightened families may get a civil marriage as readily as Americans go to a justice of the peace instead of being married in church, a Hindu pair whose parents are orthodox might hesitate for a long time before disobeying and wounding them.

But legal sanction of marriage by free choice has brought with it many changes in the status of women. Now only rarely will one see, in the streets of South India, a Hindu wife walking five paces behind her husband as a sign of deep respect. The subservient wife is becoming an increasing rarity in the new free India, now that the woman is no longer regarded by law as the property of her husband.

Under ancient Hinduism, a woman was forbidden to go out of the house without the consent of her husband. 'She shall not laugh,' one of the old books of laws reads, 'without drawing her veil before her face; she shall never hold discourse with a strange man, but may converse with an ascetic, a hermit, or an old man.' If her husband should go on a journey, 'she shall not hear music, nor shall she behold anything choice and rare; she shall not blacken her eyes with eye powder, and shall not view her face in a mirror; but shall fasten well the house door.'

Slight traces of this ancient psychology still cling to the traditional Hindu wife, who is excessively modest, shy, and retiring. But the ultimate ritual of devotion to her husband is thoroughly extinct: namely, the practice of suttee, under which in ancient times it was considered 'proper for a woman after her husband's death to burn herself in the fire with his corpse; every woman who thus burns herself shall remain in Paradise with her husband.' Suttee has long been prohibited by law.

For more than a century no widow anywhere in India has been



expected to join her husband so precipitately in the next world. It has, however, been legally impossible for her to acquire a new husband in this one. If she was orthodox, she withdrew from normal activity, prepared her meals separately in some dark corner of the house, and shaved her head to make herself unattractive to men for the rest of her lonely, unwanted life. If she was modern, she probably threw herself into political life and perhaps joined the growing ranks of progressive women who have been crusading tirelessly for reform of India's outdated marriage laws.

The attitude of orthodox Hinduism toward widows, and toward wives as well, was so puzzling to me that I consulted a learned swami on the subject. 'Marriage is a unity of two souls,' he explained, 'and the woman's highest task is to produce a worthy race.' Goswami Ganesh Dutt was deeply concerned with the importance to the country of 'the best type of race'. He was a sweet-faced man of great erudition and high priest of Birla Temple. He was troubled by modern society, in which a woman feels 'unsafe' and therefore 'just runs out to earn a living', and he believed that when women 'kept the home and churned buffalo milk, it gave them health, happiness, and plenty.' As for the widow: 'She is held in highest respect by everyone; her devotion is so great that she does not remarry, and we call her *jagat mata*, or "world mother".'

Although Birla's priest disapproved the prevailing 'temptation to remarriage,' as he called it, Birla's newspapers are full of tempting matrimonial ads., for and from widows: 'Beautiful educated issueless widow seeks suitable, well-settled match.' 'Electrical engineer seeks sweet-tempered issueless widow with landed property. Caste no barrier. No tallying of horoscopes.' Or 'Issueless widower seeks virgin widow. Early marriage. Photo exchangeable.'

The virgin widows of India are the child brides whose husbands—sometimes quite elderly men—died during the period of formal betrothal, customary in some parts of the country, where the family agreements are drawn up and preliminary ceremonies celebrated, and the girl permitted to grow to a 'proper age' before she moves into her husband's house.

Gandhi, who worked toward women's emancipation, cam-



paigned against this vicious custom of ill-matched marriage. As always, the Mahatma called on strength from within to resist the evil, rather than jurisdiction imposed from without. He urged young girls to have the strength to refuse to be married off until they had reached suitable age, and to reject a match where they did not have the final choice. Mrs Naidu furthered the crusade against child marriage and campaigned for greater freedom for the unhappy widow.

Under the new Code, the girl must be fourteen and the man eighteen before marrying. The All-India Women's Conference is campaigning to raise the ages even higher—to sixteen for the girl and twenty-one for the man. Public agitation is growing against marriages in which there is an excessive discrepancy between ages, and the bridegroom in his sixties on the way to his wedding with a girl in her teens may find himself confronted by picketers carrying placards condemning the event. India, unlike most Western countries, has more men than women. This, in addition to the rigid necessity of finding a wife within one's own sub-caste, has been a cause of many such marriages in the past, a condition which is swiftly changing under the new laws.

Under other new and liberal laws, divorce, hitherto forbidden by Hinduism, will be obtainable on the grounds of cruelty, insanity, desertion, conversion to another religion, the keeping of a concubine. Monogamy, formerly enforced only under scattered local legislation, will be called for by national law. Actually, polygamy, although sanctioned under Hindu law, has not been common practice for many years. Baroda and Bombay led the way in making monogamy a matter of law.

The property rights of women in the past have been closely interlinked with marriage. Under Hindu law a daughter could not inherit. Her brothers, who inherited her share, would pass it on to her in the form of dowry when she married—at which time her husband and husband's relatives took it over. Under the new laws, the daughter receives her 'dowry' in the form of a trust which is hers at eighteen, whether or not she takes a husband.

Birth control is a cause which faces more obstacles in India, although in some ways its many Indian supporters face less specific opposition than its American advocates. India has no laws



forbidding doctors to disseminate birth-control information as needed. Poverty and ignorance, and the difficulty of obtaining proper instruction and the necessary materials, are the most serious obstacles to a birth-control programme.

But the Western reader who might think of birth control as the panacea for India's troubles should realize that 'over-population' is not the whole problem. India's population has actually been increasing at a slower rate than such countries as England and Holland, whose peoples have almost doubled in the past fifty years. The relative density of the population per square mile in the Netherlands is three times as great as in India; with the United Kingdom the ratio is two to one. These two European nations have been able to draw sustenance for their multiplying populations from their vast empires. This colonial policy had a direct and devastating effect on India's population problem: with the artificial retardation of her industry under British rule, millions of craftsmen were thrown back on the land, with agriculture as their sole occupation. With independence, the government hopes for a rapid building up of Indian industry, so that much of this surplus population can be drawn off the overcrowded land into new industries, while irrigation projects and scientific agriculture will increase the yield of the land.

Yet the realities of an expanding population do confront India, and enlightened citizens recognize this. A courageous stand has been taken by the All-India Women's Conference, which has come out boldly with the statement: 'The wife shall have a right to limit her family. It shall be the duty of the state to provide facilities for acquiring the necessary knowledge by married women.' In Bombay Municipality, 'Family-Planning Clinics' are being established. Private clinics made a start in other parts of the country after Margaret Sanger's visit to India in 1932, when she toured the main cities and gave lectures attended by tens of thousands. Although nothing in the Hindu religion specifically forbids the practice of contraception, most religious leaders take the stand that birth control must be accomplished through self-control. This was Gandhi's view. Realizing that Gandhi was in a position to influence millions, Mrs Sanger appealed to him 'to advise something practical, something that can be applied to solve the



problem of too-frequent childbearing.' Gandhi's answer was that for a man to desire his wife, except for the purpose of producing progeny, was not love but lust. 'Every husband and wife can make a fixed resolution,' he told Mrs Sanger, 'never to share the same room or the same bed at night and to avoid sexual contact except for the one supreme purpose for which it is intended.'

'Must sexual union take place only three or four times in an entire lifetime?' asked Mrs Sanger, but the Mahatma would not be budged. He agreed that a woman should be privileged to limit the number of her children, but contraceptives were 'an insult to womanhood'. Overcoming 'lust toward one's own wife' took constant vigilance, 'like walking on a sword's edge.' He detailed to Mrs Sanger his own extensive experiments along this line, how he had discovered that 'cleansing the heart of passion' was most readily accomplished on a diet of fruit and nuts. Milk, his researches had taught him, was a stimulant. The extinction of passion had been 'a matter of very great effort' after his doctor had made him go back to drinking milk. Control of the palate was indissolubly linked with observance of abstinence (a condition, by the way, which Gandhi imposed not only on himself but on all members of his ashram).

Despite opposition, birth-control information is given out quietly and efficiently, I discovered, in various parts of India. In the dispensaries of the Tata Steel Works, doctors and nurses have been directed to furnish instruction and materials to mothers as needed. Tata's also maintains maternity wards and sends visiting nurses to aid and instruct women in child care; weekly classes are conducted for expectant mothers.

The shortage of nurses is acute in India, for nursing has until recently been considered a disreputable occupation—in a class with singing and dancing. Public opinion is changing rapidly, and the government is drawing up a ten-year programme which will train thousands of much-needed nurses and doctors. Steps are being taken by the government toward control of tuberculosis, cholera, and malaria. Health services are beginning to reach the peasant, sorely neglected under nearly two hundred years of foreign rule. As a preliminary measure, medical vans equipped with doctor, nurse, and stove for sterilization are circulating



through many remote areas. By the beating of drums, the surrounding villages are advised of the arrival of the medical van.

Maternity centres are springing up in various rural districts. In a tiny Mysore town named Chitaldrug I visited one of these maternity homes, established under the auspices of the State People's Party and run by a big motherly woman named Beleri Siddanama.

Beleri's little hospital was a valuable community service in a peasant area like this one, where a woman must otherwise bear her child hidden away in a seldom-used corner of the house. Her presence during childbirth, and menstruation as well, is 'unclean' and will pollute the better rooms. She will be attended only by base-born persons; individuals belonging to higher castes would be polluted by her. Her baby is delivered by the *dai*, customarily the barber's wife. Often as richly equipped with superstitions as she is deficient in sanitation, the barber's wife is unlikely to know the virtues of boiling water for sterilizing instruments.

After visiting Beleri's hospital, which has helped to do away with primitive practices of childbirth, I was taken to her house to bathe and eat, and suddenly found myself, confusingly, encountering another sort of primitive Indian practice.

Beleri Siddanama's bathroom was like that of any middle-class villager and many city dwellers. Conducted into this concrete cubicle and left to my own devices, I was somewhat puzzled. Along one wall was a large concrete trough filled with water and roughly resembling a bathtub. I hesitated to step into it, because I couldn't see the bottom, and I later learned it stored the water supply for an entire season. On the floor were beautiful goose-necked jars of hammered brass, some of them enormous and filled with water, and some of them too heavy to move. The entire floor sloped toward a narrow ditch, and near the centre were a couple of concrete steps which led nowhere. On my first attempt at bathing, I could figure out nothing better to do than dip my handkerchief in one of the enormous brass vessels and scrub myself rather unsatisfactorily from head to foot. Eventually I became sufficiently proficient in Indian bathing technique to know that the correct procedure was to choose the least unwieldy of the brass vessels and stand like a statue in an ornamental fountain pouring



water over myself. This procedure is consistent with the Indian opinion that it is a barbarous practice to sit in one's own bath water, which becomes increasingly dirty as one bathes.

Beleri's excellent supper was a typical South Indian meal, a fiery march through successively spicier sauces, poured in peppery crescendo over the hillock of rice on the plate. As I ate away my rice pile my hostess kept heaping it higher and the two servants kept returning in a continuous relay, ladling out their dahl and chilis and curries and chutneys. In some localities the base of the meal is some local product, such as gram or wheat, instead of rice, and the flavours of the sauces differ from province to province, but the effect is always the same. By the time you feel flames licking up inside you and are convinced that you will never be able to taste or swallow again, a bowl of buttermilk or curds is poured over the remnants of your rice pile, and when you have gasped your way through that you find yourself magically cooled off again.

I learned to like this dramatic sequence of flavours—although I never quite accustomed myself to some of the flaming concoctions I had to eat for breakfast—but stubbornly as I tried, I never learned to sit on the floor and eat with my fingers. To get the better of a platter of cereal grains swimming in soupy sauces by the skill of your hands alone is, I decided, an art which needs cultivation from babyhood. Finally I gave up trying to eat like an Asian and carried a fork and spoon at all times in my handbag, bringing them out at meal-time to the great amusement of the Indian families I visited.

Sitting cross-legged while you eat looks casual and easy, but halfway through the meal, when your legs painfully go to sleep, you realize that East surpasses West in this skill also. In most Indian homes, even among the well-to-do, there is very little furniture higher than a floor pad, but my courteous hosts would always manage to devise something high for me to eat from. Perched above the family like a schoolteacher in a kindergarten class, I would overlook them as they squatted in a comfortable row along the floor, their slender hands flying over the flat plates like children making finger paintings.

Once in Bombay I dined on Malabar Hill in the apartment of



an Indian business man. He had brought back ideas from homes he had visited in Beverly Hills and New York, and his furnishings were as modernistic as a Hollywood set. We sat on streamlined chairs at a glass and plastic table overlooking Bombay Harbour through great curving glass windows, and ate a partly European, partly Indian meal. In the middle of the curry, his beautiful and fashionable wife dropped her fork and, turning to me, asked: 'Do you mind if I eat with my fingers? It tastes so much better that way.'

In a more traditional Indian family, the entire meal from chutney to buttermilk is eaten from a single plate, which will be a flat round platter of either brass or silver, or a plate of leaves. The leaf plates—used by rich and poor alike—are aesthetic and labour-saving. In a few odd hours one can sew a year's supply, using banana or other strong leaves, stitched together decoratively with raffia. It always delighted me when the plates were thrown away at the end of the meal and nobody had to wash the dishes.

The readiness with which I was invited to share food everywhere I travelled is in itself a testimony to the dissolving of caste barriers. One of the strongest caste taboos has been against eating with others than members of one's own caste. Allowing an out-caste or untouchable to approach one's food, or even touch the dishes was unthinkable. I was considered a 'casteless person', with immunity from regulations in most circles, although unacceptable to the strictly orthodox.

A striking contrast between two-thousand-year-old custom and twentieth-century life is often to be found within a single family. I recall dining in a Brahman household with some young and completely modern Indian friends. Through a passage-way I could see the grandfather of the household, sitting by himself on the stone floor eating his solitary meal. Beside him was the primitive little stove of flat stones in which his food had been separately prepared in his own set of cooking vessels to avoid pollution.

Brahmans who follow ritual as faithfully as my friends' grandfather will soon become a rarity. But in rural sections of South India, where caste has been strongest, the perfect specimen of orthodox Brahman may still be found. For him the act of eating is surrounded by so many troublesome regulations that one won-



ders if he has time for anything else at all. He may take food only after bathing and changing into garments which have been freshly washed and dried in a place where nothing 'ceremonially impure', such as a donkey, a pig, or a woman who is menstruating, has brushed against them. Unless he dines with members of his own sub-sect he must eat alone. He may not read while he eats; printing ink is impure. If by accident he touches an earthen water jar or any article made of leather before eating, or if he is touched by a dog or by a child old enough to eat solid food, or by another Brahman who has just eaten, he must forgo his dinner.

Keeping water 'pure' is even more troublesome and unjust. Indian villages have separate wells for untouchables; invariably poorer ones, more apt to dry up in time of drought. These inequalities are due for swift change. Under the new constitution the barring of anyone for reasons of caste from the use of wells and tanks maintained by the state or 'dedicated to the use of the general public' is prevented by law. But in backward areas, much education of public opinion will be needed before these laws become a part of everyday living, for the Brahmanical philosophy of caste supremacy has been ingrained for centuries.

To a remarkable degree ancient Hinduism fostered Brahman superiority and surrounded it with precise safeguards. As priests and teachers, the Brahmans originally had a monopoly on literacy, and without their sacred offices none of the vital ceremonies attending birth, marriage, or easing the soul from this world into the next could be performed. According to the Code of Manu, recorded in sacred verse at about the beginning of the Christian era but reaching much further back into antiquity, a Brahman—whatever his crime—might never be put to death, might never be made a slave. If he fell into debt he was permitted to 'discharge it little by little according to his means', while a man of lower caste could be forced to work out his indebtedness in day labour. A hungry Brahman might take food from the lands of a stranger and 'not be considered a thief', but if a man of inferior caste should steal 'flowers or fruits or wood or grass belonging to a Brahman, the magistrate shall cut off his hand'. If a man of inferior caste, 'proudly affecting equality', should speak at the same time as a Brahman or travel by his side on the road, he would



be 'fined to the extent of his abilities'. If he kicked a Brahman his foot was cut off. In case of adultery, 'when men of other castes shall be deprived of life, a Brahman guilty thereof shall not be deprived of life but the hair of his head shall be cut off.'

These glaring inequalities have, of course, since ceased to exist in the legal sense, although some aura of privilege still clings to the higher castes in reactionary Hindu circles. These ancient regulations make clearer why the Hindu Mahasabha and R.S.S. glorify racial purity and seek to return to the 'pure Hinduism of two thousand years ago,' when the upper castes had the best of everything.

According to sacred Vedic scripture, Brahman supremacy began with creation itself. The learned Brahmans sprang from the mouth of the god Brahma; the Kshatriyas, the rulers and warriors, from the god's arm; the Vaisyas, the merchants and shopkeepers, from the divine thigh. The Sudras, those labourers and craftsmen born to serve the three higher classes, were created from the feet of the god.

Far below were the untouchables, who possessed no caste status at all, and could gain caste only in the next incarnation. By model behaviour as untouchables they could, in the cycle of rebirth, be reborn into higher status according to the theory of karma, which under centuries of orthodox Hinduism has explained why some people have all the wealth, all the enjoyment of life, while the rest have to sweat for a meagre livelihood.

A less mystical explanation of caste is that the Aryan invaders, who infiltrated India from 2000 B.C. onwards, subjugated the Dravidians, the original inhabitants. The aboriginals were dark, as untouchables are to-day; the conquerors were fair-skinned, as present-day Brahmans and high-caste persons tend to be. From the waves of conquerors the three highest castes originated, and the conquered became low-caste or outcaste. Prevention of inter-marriage between conquerors and conquered was enforced by the most extreme method imaginable, 'untouchability'. Untouchables were forced to all menial tasks, and were 'unclean'.

Over the centuries some intermingling inevitably occurred, creating new sub-divisions, but the compartments tended to crystallize on the basis of hereditary occupation. The trade of each



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sub-caste was handed down from father to son, and castes even to-day tend to take on the character of craft guilds. Under the 'Rights of Equality' in the new constitution, caste discrimination is outlawed, India's forty million untouchables receive equal citizenship, and ' "untouchability" ' is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden.' But more far-reaching than law is the coming of industry to independent India. A machine cares nothing about a man's ancestors, does not feel polluted by his touch, knows no prejudice.



## Chapter XI

### THE CHILDREN IN THE LIME PIT

UNTIL my eyes became accustomed to the dim light in the tannery it looked almost as though the children were dancing. Up and down they bobbed in the acid pits, pressing the lime solution through the hides under their feet. Perspiration glistened on their lean brown bodies as they shifted their weight endlessly from one foot to another.

'These are all untouchables. No one else will work with the skin of the dead cow,' said Iyengar. Iyengar was an insurance salesman from Trichinopoly, in the Tamil-speaking area of southern India. He must have been about thirty-seven, although the prematurely white hair which contrasted strikingly with his olive-toned skin made him look older. He was deeply interested in child labour questions and devoted all his spare time to the Trichy Tannery Workers' Union.

I could hardly have descended the caste ladder more abruptly than I had done since just that morning. At daybreak I had visited a high peak of Brahmanism, the Golden Rock Temple for which Trichinopoly is famous. Carved out of the entire summit of a dizzy peak, it is approached by a fabulous flight of stairs hewn out of the cliff walls. Up those steps pass streams of Brahmans with sacred symbols on their foreheads and prayers on their lips.

As a foreigner 'without caste' I had been permitted to climb up to the temple gates, but I was not allowed into the deep inner temple where the chiselled and painted gods crooked their multiple arms over offerings of flowers and sandalwood fires. But I had been allowed to come closer to the sacred images in the temple than any untouchable in Trichinopoly ever had been. No untouchable could put his foot to the lowest step, or even walk through the street of Brahman residences which led up to the temple stairs.

No Brahman would dream of visiting the places reserved for



untouchables either, particularly a tannery, where dead cowhides were processed by outcastes, except a progressive Brahman like Iyengar, who was a Communist and opposed to caste barriers.

‘Work quickly,’ he said. ‘We’ll be put out when the proprietor sees you have a camera. Some of these children are under twelve.’

I found it hard to work quickly because of the perspiration dripping into my eyes and the tears that kept starting up from the fumes of the acid pits. The sparing sunbeams that slid in dazzling, oblique shafts through chinks in the roof failed to illuminate the great cavelike place, and only made it harder to see into the deep shadows. Women, carrying piles of dripping hides, flashed into sight for a moment as they passed through the sunbeams and then vanished as they moved into the darkness of the storage bins. The wet shoulders of children were touched briefly with gilt as they flung heaps of skins over the pit’s edge, climbed hastily out to an iron spigot, rinsed arms and legs, and scrambled back into the lime bath again.

‘More than twenty minutes in the pit, and blood comes,’ said Iyengar. ‘Then the skin of their hands and feet begins to peel.’

By now I had managed to focus, and was shooting off a flash-bulb here and there. The people did not act like those I had seen in other parts of India, where the sight of a foreigner draws spectators like a magnet and a camera arouses feverish curiosity. The leather workers hardly glanced up from their labour.

‘If they don’t complete their daily unit they don’t get any pay,’ said Iyengar. ‘Then, too, there’s the hope of overtime.’ He pointed to a group of women whose strained faces made them look fifty years old, but who probably—judging by the heavy work they were doing—were only half that age. He singled out one woman in a dull-blue, acid-stained sari, dragging a heap of black, reeking hides. ‘You see how far gone in pregnancy she is. She is sticking at her task as long as she can to help the family get overtime. Usually they all have to work together—mother, father, and children—to make it. Earning the overtime is difficult because they don’t get any extra pay unless they can double the day’s unit.’

The basic unit, he told me, was one hundred skins. If the family, working as fast as they could and snatching as little time as pos-



sible for the necessary foot baths, totalled only one hundred and eighty skins, for example, they were paid only for the original hundred. But even if they completed the two hundred they received for the second cruel hundred only half the rate paid for the first.

‘The most serious part of the speed-up is the temptation to neglect safety precautions,’ said Iyengar. ‘Every fifteen minutes they should come out of the lime bath and wash in a neutralizing bark solution. The soles of their feet and the palms of their hands corrode from staying in the pits. And then, stripped to the waist as the children are, the concentrated lime begins wasting away the more delicate parts of their bodies.’

The Trichy Tannery Workers’ Union was fighting to get rubber aprons and gloves and simple protective devices, but every forward step was difficult. ‘The people are regarded as nothing but chattel,’ said Iyengar. While the workers received no pay at all if they failed to complete their minimum daily unit, the owner was not obliged to pay the minimum wage if he failed to furnish the minimum number of skins. When there was a shortage of hides or if he delayed his purchases because of market fluctuations, he paid his workers only according to the number of hides he provided, or else laid them off altogether. But even when he was short of skins, his workers could not go on to another factory without his permission, for they always had debts for housing and food by which he could hold them. ‘Most of them owe fifty or sixty rupees,’ said Iyengar, ‘and it continues throughout life. However, some of the liberal employers will permit them to work in another factory until he gets skins, and then he calls them back.’

The owner of the tannery was not one of the ‘liberals’, I gathered. He appeared at that moment, looking plump and comfortable in spotless white duck trousers and red tasseled fez—and began shouting at us from across the tannery. I was surprised to see his Muslim fez, in this Hindu part of the country, and then I realized that even after India’s division only a Muslim could do business in leather, since Hindus may not deal with cowhides. I should have liked to stay and question the employer, but I let myself be whisked out as I knew Iyengar was in sufficient difficulties already through his activities with the Tannery Workers’ Union.



'He makes 12 per cent profit every month,' said Iyengar, as we walked away long the hot white road. 'At least those are his book figures. But personally, I doubt it. Few Indian businesses of this type would operate for only 144 per cent yearly profit on their investment, least of all a tannery, because the profits on leather are enormous. During the war years the tanneries reaped huge profits, but the workers got no share in them.' According to the income tax figures, the establishment we had seen, which employed 300 workers, netted 'a lakh plus 84,000 rupees' last year; a lakh is the Indian denomination for 100,000, which would bring the tanner's profit to about £15,000. 'But none of these people keep proper accounts,' said Iyengar. 'He may have been evading taxes and then we could not learn his real profit.'

The children were paid as little as six or seven rupees a month (ten shillings or under) if they worked directly for the employer; they received no wages when they were brought in by the father in an effort to increase his twenty-two rupee monthly wage with overtime. Children were in considerable demand by tannery owners throughout this whole part of Madras because the work of pressing down the hides was so simple that any youngster could do it, and their wages made hardly a dent in the wages bill.

The new Constitution outlaws child labour in the 'hazardous occupations,' but so far the tanneries have escaped being classed as hazardous. The older Factories Act had already forbidden any employment of children under twelve: between twelve and eighteen they were classed as 'juveniles' and permitted to work only 'part time'. 'Part time' meant six hours in the acid pits instead of the nine to twelve which their parents worked. The Factories Act also provided for one day off every two weeks, but there was hardly a child who did not find himself working thirty continuous days to earn his pay.

'The inspector comes once a month,' Iyengar told me. 'He doesn't question the workers. He has tea with the boss. Or if he goes into the factory, which is seldom, the smaller children are hurried out the back door, and the "juveniles" are given false names in case of questioning.'

'The idea of control by the Labour Department in the government is very good. But if the inspector gets seventy-five rupees



a month from the government, the tannery will give him one hundred rupees. The men who are employed for this work must be paid enough so they will not take bribes.

‘And then the tannery is always getting special exemptions because the tanning of leather is a “continuous process”. I recalled hearing that in the early days of the American steel industry, when men who worked with molten metal were appealing for an eight-hour day, the same argument was used. All these exemptions make it even more difficult to get the fortnightly holiday enforced, but the union is fighting for a weekly holiday for the children.’

I think it was the unfamiliar use of the word ‘holiday’ that really brought home to me the meaning of what I had seen. One day a week when a child might run in the open air and sunlight! One weekly holiday when these ‘children of God’, as Gandhi called them, might play hide-and-seek in these magnificent piles of smooth rocks, which take on magic shapes in South India, like petrified animals, or like stone castles where any child would love to climb. One little holiday, when a child might splash in a running brook instead of wading knee-deep in concentrated lime with the grim certainty that his flesh was being eaten away.

Iyengar questioned me, as Indians almost always did, about Negroes and Jim Crowism, and when I tried to explain, as I always did, that our democracy was really against discrimination, he shook his head and said, ‘The Negroes are untouchables.’

This made me wonder about Iyengar himself, for I knew from his name that he was a high-caste Brahman.

‘Why are you so much interested in these problems of caste discrimination?’ I asked.

‘Because something constructive must be substituted for caste. Especially in the light of these artificial barriers—Muslim League, Hindus, harijans. The groping toward a new democratic system, that is important.’

‘Why are you a Communist?’

‘Because the Communist Party in India stands for the oppressed people.’

There is no denying the fact that the Communist Party in India has attracted some of the most earnest, intelligent, and cultured



young men in the country. The party is small; one gets less impression that these young Indians are acting according to strings pulled from Moscow than that the needs of their under-privileged countrymen are so compelling that they are trying to choose the most direct channel for their efforts, without being side-tracked by the high-echelon rivalries which have racked the other political parties and diverted their vitality from basic issues.

'To-day much of the leadership of India—even though Gandhi and Nehru are good men—stands for the capitalists, for the rich.' Iyengar walked along in silence for a moment, and then added, 'That is how I feel. My conviction is that.'

He told me it was at college that he had first come in contact with Communist literature. He studied at Benares University, the scholastic heart of orthodox Hinduism; at that time the Communist Party was illegal, and some of his schoolmates used to stow away forbidden books in his room, knowing their own quarters would be searched. 'I became filled with intellectual curiosity about the books they hid in my room and started reading Beatrice Webb on the Soviet Union, and a little Marx. I came out of college inspired with the desire to work for the benefit of the working class, the *kisan*—the poor people. But I was very quickly put in jail for leading a strike of foundry workers. So I came into greater contact with our comrades through the jail. In 1942 Communism became legal and we were all released.

'I had notions of seeing the country, and I managed to travel through other parts of India. As I came to know my country and the conditions of workers, my conception of freedom changed. We have dreamed about freedom for so long! When workers are not subject to exploitation, that will be real freedom. And I shall have to work for it.'

Iyengar had just finished this declaration of purpose when we caught up with a small procession of youngsters marching along the road carrying a wide red banner strung between two poles. On one corner was a hammer and sickle, and laboriously sewn across the flag were several rows of white cloth characters in Tamil, the language of the region. 'These are representatives of the Trichy Tannery Workers' Union,' said Iyengar, as proud as though they were his own children. 'They are calling all the chil-



dren to a union meeting to be held to-night under the big banyan tree in the next village.'

It was an unusual union meeting which I photographed that night, with its large proportion of children. They began arriving at twilight, as they were released from their work in the pits, and they took their places quietly on the ground under the banyan tree. Long after darkness fell, the leather workers came streaming in, until the ground far beyond the banyan tree was filled with hundreds of untouchables, most of them children. I thought I had never seen such serious children. The lamplight fell on the first few rows of faces, lighting up childish eyes grave and wise beyond their years, and illuminating the red banner which listed the union's demands.

There were four demands, having to do with the weekly holiday, with raising the minimum wage, getting proportional extra pay for overtime, and obtaining 'dearness allowance' according to the government 'cost-of-living index'. After taking up these immediate demands, the meeting touched on more difficult goals, such as factory compensation and rubber gloves and aprons. Some far-away dreams were discussed, like sickness insurance and security of employment. The union leader, Dorograj, shook his great black mane of hair to emphasize each point as it was brought up. Iyengar translated to me in snatches while I worked, and three untouchable youngsters solemnly held my reflectors as high as their arms would reach while I took photographs.

Then Dorograj came up to me and said pleadingly, 'The people want to hear from the American woman. Just a short speech: I will translate your words for them.'

'A few words only,' Iyengar urged me. 'Just so they can see a white woman who is not a mem-sahib. Talk to them just a little.'

It was hard for me to find words for people carrying so grave a load, and with such stern obstacles to overcome before they could raise themselves even to human level. I remember standing there in the lamplight feeling more inadequacy before this audience of untouchables than I had felt before any other group in my life.

The children watched me with their big wise eyes while I groped for some simple way to do on a very small scale that awe-



some thing we hear about so much: bridging the gap between America and Asia. I plunged in by speaking of the great thing our two nations had in common. We had both yearned for freedom, we had worked for it, and we had won it.

The mention of freedom is magic to Indians, and as Dorograj translated, the untouchables broke into cheers. He must have embroidered considerably in translation, for his Tamil phrases poured out in impressive cadences, while the people clapped and smiled.

'Pretty unrealistic of me,' I said to Iyengar as the meeting came to an end, 'to talk about an education when they're in the midst of a situation like this.'

'No,' he said. 'You were right. The parents will understand. The thirst for an education for their children is there.'

Then Iyengar and I walked away under a sky alive with stars, as the children swarmed off into the darkness to crawl into the cramped chawls, as airless as dog kennels, which were their homes, to spend a few hours sleeping on the ground before climbing back into the lime pits at dawn.



## Chapter XII

### FAMINE IN SOUTH INDIA

‘IF someone shoots us, if someone gives us poison, it would make us very happy,’ said Sannaligappa, the Mysori peasant. ‘If the children also are poisoned before my eyes I could die without any worry.’

His desperate words, spoken in his own Kannada dialect were translated for me by Shankar, a schoolmaster. Shankar had met me when I came from nearby Trichinopoli, to conduct me through the famine-stricken villages of Mysore which he knew well, for his work had brought him close to the problems of the people whose children he had taught.

As he translated painstakingly into his meticulous English, the peasant’s lament sounded a bit melodramatic, but his troubles were very real.

Drought was searing the countryside, and the tiny community of Kallahalli, in which Sannaligappa was the most prosperous peasant, was fast becoming almost a deserted village. All but the richest, who did not want to leave their land and possessions, and the poorest, whose legs were already too thin and weak to carry them, had taken to the roads.

Fear of impending famine had driven them from their homes to search for that elusive goal, a ‘surplus area’ where they would find work and food. They would have a long distance to trudge toward that perhaps mythical spot, for Kallahalli was a remote village. It was located almost on the northern border of Mysore State, close to the State of Hyderabad, and near the edge of Madras Presidency, where Anantapur District thrusts a kind of handle in between the two princely states. The whole region was suffering from the lateness of the rains, which caused special hardship in an area like this where nothing had been done to help the peasant with irrigation for more than two hundred years, and where the fine deep wells built many centuries ago by the Mogul Emperors had fallen into disrepair under colonial rule and were too far apart to serve the entire countryside.



In time of scarcity the young men are always the first to leave the village. Then the families left behind begin to disintegrate. After using up whatever grain they saved from last year's harvest and barely getting along on loans until they can get no more credit, they forfeit their homes, sell their meagre possessions, and join the ever-increasing bands of destitutes on the roads. On our journey from Chitaldrug to Kallahalli we had seen many of these groups, straggling toward the relief stations in the towns, stretching out their hands to beg from all who passed. These were not professional beggars, just peasants who had lost in the waiting game with the monsoon.

Times would have to grow worse before Sannaligappa would leave his land, for he owned thirty-five acres of rich black soil and in normal times would have a crop of cotton, wheat, and raggee, and even a profit in rupees, with which he would employ some of the landless peasants of the village. He stood in the centre of his centuries-old hut, while his numerous and emaciated family squatted around him on the earth floor. The dignity of the many frugal generations who had lived here hung over his home. On three sides of the room, the fat round grain pots rose in tiers like great black beads strung from floor to ceiling. Along the fourth, a row of beautifully tapered jars, each one tall enough to hold a man, had been built right into the ancient masonry of the wall.

'You may search all this'—Sannaligappa waved his hands toward the jars—'and you will not find any grains. Though we are prepared to spend money we cannot get food grains.' He was bitter about the black marketing rampant under the government of the princes. Supplies sent to the ration shops to be sold to the peasants on their food cards were somehow spirited away into the cellars of those who had more than the legal price to pay. A peasant could trudge the weary miles to the nearest ration shop, when the date on his food card came round, only to find that any cereal left to buy was too wormy to eat. Sannaligappa and his brothers were tramping the countryside each day to gather seeds from the tamarind tree to supplement the family's food. 'A human being can hardly force them in,' said Sannaligappa. And, emotional as most Indians are, he began to weep and cry out, 'I cannot bear to see my children suffer. Better give us poison.'



As their father talked, the children watched him with eyes too large and luminous for their thin faces. Both his little daughters were going through the motions of eating. The five-year-old was munching some tamarind seeds which the mother had soaked in water. The five-month-old sucked some white paste from her mother's finger: a substitute, I learned, for the breast milk which the young mother was too undernourished to supply. The paste had been boiled up from raggee—a cereal which I had found strenuous diet even for an adult, but the small supply the family still possessed was being hoarded for the baby.

Even Sannaligappa, in his cloudy way, realized that a little science in the right place could mean the difference between life and death to his village. He did not know, as the experts do, that an estimated 35 per cent of all the rain that falls each year on India flows uselessly back into the sea. But he knew that 'if only they could have trapped the rains that fell last year,' this year would have been a very different story. He possessed the even more bitter knowledge that the capricious abundance of last year's downfall had actually intensified this year's suffering. Kallahalli, like many Central and South Indian villages, depended on its 'tank', the earth-walled pond which from time immemorial Indian peasants have built as a reservoir. Under a sudden heavy hammering of rain during the last monsoon, one of the tank walls had given way and all the precious water store swept out. The splendid cloudburst that should have been a blessing to Kallahalli had brought tragedy.

The news of the broken embankment moved Shankar more than anything else we had heard. A concrete wall instead of a bank of mud, a comprehensive irrigation plan instead of spotty medieval hand-downs—these things could change the face of India.

We left the house, stepping over the good-luck emblems chalked in the front yard (which are drawn there fresh each day, as soon as the women have cleaned the house, to attract the family gods inside).

'No one would think,' said Shankar, 'that 90 per cent of the country's entire population are peasants, when so pitifully little has been done to help them.'

'But now with freedom'—he spoke the word as though he loved



it—‘we must put an end to this neglect of the peasant.’ We rounded a heap of boulders and a little cluster of huts came into view. ‘This segregation too must be ended.’ He spoke with indignation. ‘What you see ahead of you is the untouchable section of the village.’

I had observed that Sannaligappa’s house, and all the others in his little street, had well-tiled roofs, held up by square-hewn timbers, while these hovels were so low under their matted thatch that the inhabitants would have to crawl in on hands and knees, and remain in a stooped or squatting position once inside their sweltering little cells.

‘See how carefully they locate the untouchable colony at a safe distance,’ said Shankar. ‘On the other side of the road, even.’

Even the privation I had already seen in the village did not prepare me for the abject suffering we found in the harijan quarter. Aside from one small child, who leaned on an empty kettle and wept lustily, no one seemed to have the voice or heart to protest. Men and women stood around or squatted on the ground in attitudes of complete resignation. I remembered travelling through the Dust Bowl area during America’s great drought of the middle thirties and seeing emaciated cattle standing quietly and waiting for the end. These people waited for their fate, as helpless and unprotesting as cattle. One old man squatting in the hard-baked courtyard dug weakly at a flat-leafed weed. ‘They have been eating that weed,’ said Shankar, ‘but by now most of it has been eaten away.’

Some three hundred million people live in close to seven hundred thousand villages very much like Kallahalli, most of them many blazing miles away from any roads. The highroads of India were laid out in consultation with generals, not with cultivators; they connect the great cities with the seaports, the rail junctions in the plains with the vacation spots in the mountains, but they ignore the needs of the peasantry so completely that one wonders whether the builders ever paused to remember that the nation’s farmers produce the nation’s food.

The peasant was not always the forgotten man in India. In the medieval days of the Mogul emperors he was an integral part of a closely knit society. While there were many abuses under a



feudal system, still there was recognition of the vital importance of the peasant in the scheme of things. A certain amount of justice to the peasant was at least its intention. Revenue officers were instructed to collect their share of the crops with caution and fairness; a directive to the collectors under the Moguls was that 'any excess collected not only involved injustice toward the cultivators; it was a fraud against the state as well.'

The tax collectors, or 'zemindars', soared to a new position of unbridled power with the arrival of the British in India, more than 150 years ago. The keystone for the British merchant-conqueror was not the peasant, who grew the grain, but the zemindar, who collected a large share of it as taxes. Soon the East India Company found crops an inconvenient form of revenue. The fluctuations of the harvest were too unpredictable for merchants who were always on the move and too remote for the understanding of rulers removed by oceans. A fixed cash revenue was more practical—not, of course, for the peasant, who naturally was never consulted, but for the officers of the East India Company.

With the stabilization of the cash tribute to be paid to the British Crown, the zemindars became such an essential part of the pattern that they were stabilized too. Some zemindars were the original feudal landlords, some were merely tax collectors who were given land in exchange for services; but whatever their origin, the Permanent Land Settlement of 1793 made of the zemindars and their descendants in perpetuity a permanent landlord class. Only their own ingenuity limited how large the zemindars could make their own share of the revenue as long as they turned over the agreed cash tax to the new controlling power from across the seas.

Parallel with the perpetuation of the feudal landlord was a deliberate restriction of awakening Indian industry, with its growing textile manufacture, ironworks, and flourishing arts and crafts. The pressure on the land increased, the peasantry grew poorer. As the Western world marched on with its Industrial Revolution, with its parallel agricultural improvements and increased human rights, the Indian peasant was left behind—preserved like an insect in amber—trapped in the Middle Ages without the tools or the enlightenment for the uphill climb.

The coming of independence so far has brought little in the way



of freedom to her three hundred and fifty million peasants, still helpless under the crushing weight of the zemindari system. Its abolition was a major election manifesto of the Congress Party during the long fight for self-rule. Now with independence the new government, along with glowing programmes for science in agriculture, has plans for reform of the out-moded system of land tenure. Bihar, Madras, and the United Provinces have led the way in passing Zemindari Abolition Laws, but the government advises a go-slow policy. The zemindars are to receive compensation in return for their lands, but at the scale set the cost would be prodigious. Some of the younger leaders are saying that the conservatives in the government are purposely setting the compensation at an impractically high rate, so that they will be in a position to do lip service to the need of reform while blocking any basic changes in the existing system. Many Indians believe that abolition of peasant indebtedness is much more urgent than paying high compensation to zemindars and could have a far more beneficial effect on the prosperity of India.

Meanwhile two-thirds of India's peasants are totally or nearly landless, and drag through life under hopeless debt and virtual serfdom, while the prerogatives of the zemindars in many parts of the country remain the same as they have been for centuries. The zemindar is entitled to half the harvest, but it takes only a few 'adjustments' at harvest time to boost his share to as high as 80 per cent. He does not supply a farm tool, or build a tenant's hut; he makes no effort to reclaim fallow land; he never builds a well; he does not even repair a well. But he may conjure up some matter of trifling arrears to oust a tenant who has repaired his hut or well or in some way improved the property. Since zemindars have never made a custom of issuing receipts for crops or land taxes, and since the peasant cannot read anyway, the tenant faces the risk of eviction whenever the landlord wants to get rid of him. The zemindar's unlisted prerogatives depend only on his inventiveness: he may requisition curds and buttermilk for a feast; he may borrow the tenant's bullocks to help with his private crop, but that does not mean that he supplies bullocks to help bring in his tenant's crop, which is half his already. To earn that share, the zemindar does not even furnish the seed.



To obtain his seed, the peasant comes under the even grimmer shadow of the baniya, the moneylender, whose interest rates are scarcely credible. In much of rural India, interest hovers in the neighbourhood of 37 per cent, may go much higher, and reaches as low as 18 per cent only in those progressive districts which have some legislation protecting the peasant. Even in a progressive district, the baniya can do sums with compound interest which his clients can scarcely be expected to follow. The baniya has the same heavy stake in the illiteracy of the peasant as has his closest ally, the zemindar.

I met my first great zemindar in the State of Hyderabad. He was big in holdings and big in girth. His tiny eyes peeped out from a massive face, and the diamonds and star sapphires of his many rings almost disappeared in the folds of his plump, tiny fingers. His family was one of the oldest in Hyderabad and had come from Delhi in 1650 with Asaf Jah the governor sent from Delhi by the Mogul Emperor. His vast estates were tax-free and had been a gift to his family in return for services to past nizams; he had the rank of '*paigah*' (nobleman). He was one of the few Hindu zemindars in Hyderabad State, which is in the curious situation of being headed by a Muslim ruler although its population is more than four-fifths Hindu.

He was rather a pleasant fellow in his lush, prosperous way and he talked about the problems of zemindars in the modern world with a frankness that surprised me. All big zemindars employ storm gangs, I learned, and this noble landlord, like all the greatest of the zemindars, maintained his own police force with superintendents and inspectors, his own judiciary, and his private jails. Solid as this structure was, the new spirit that had swept in with a free India was beginning to work away at the foundations. Already he was beginning to have trouble with his private police.

'To-day only,' he told me, 'all the private police went on strike. They want some more "dearness allowance".' This was to compensate for the rising cost of living, and for the zemindar to increase the 'dearness' for his police was a grave step, since he maintained a private force of seventy to guard his nine city residences and employed the astounding number of forty-five hun-



dred to police his lands. But his strikers would get their 'dearness'. He prophesied gloomily that they would not be satisfied until they had raised their present monthly pay of sixteen rupees plus four rupees' dearness allowance to a total of thirty rupees (about £2 10s. 0d.). 'We always keep them happy,' he volunteered. 'Our safety depends on them.'

We were enjoying the cool evening breeze from the high veranda of one of the smaller of his houses, and looking down over the mosques and turrets of Hyderabad City in the hot plain below. That afternoon I had been invited to tea in his chief palace. Amidst the breathless luxury of carved ebony tables, pearl and rosewood cabinets, and chandeliers dangling frighteningly close to our heads, we had nibbled from the edges of platters of sweets. When we started for the house on the hill, we left enough behind on the silver trays to furnish a nourishing meal for an entire village.

As we sat on the porch of the hill house in the twilight, the city below gradually transformed itself into a fairyland of lighted bridges, reservoirs, and boulevards, with that lavish use of electricity which spreads its magic touch through all the capitals of the larger princely states, and fades so abruptly before reaching their villages. Above the soft glow of the central square we could just catch the outlines of the four fabulous arches of Hyderabad City, some of them topped by minarets containing chambers with windows one hundred and eighty feet above the ground. These were built by a sixteenth-century sultan to this astounding height to enable men 'to look down upon the pomp and wealth of this world and behold in them nothing but vanity.'

There may have been a touch of vanity in the way the zemindar pressed on me a rare and exotic beverage called 'Moglai', distilled according to a secret formula as old as the minarets.

'This recipe is a privilege straight from the Mogul Emperor,' said the zemindar, 'which no one else enjoys. We brew it from flowers—jasmine, rose, and jaggery—and if another discovered how to make it he would be prevented by law.'

As we sipped this exclusive brew, which had the transparency and sharpness of vodka overlaid with the rather incongruous scent of jasmine, I asked the zemindar how many acres he owned.



‘Acres!’ He was almost offended. ‘There’s no question about acres. It’s so many villages.’

‘How many?’

My host had probably never been asked that question before, and had no figures at hand, but after a little mental arithmetic he estimated the size of his ‘jagir’ at five hundred villages.

It worried him considerably that these were not all in one compact area. The management of scattered estates was growing costly, particularly with the mounting expense of one’s private police force—not only their rising dearness allowance but the increased cost of modern arms over the simpler former equipment. ‘Moral circumstances now have forced us to recognize that all holdings should be consolidated and modernized.’

His Exalted Highness, the Nizam, had been the first to act on these ‘moral circumstances’, and a few years back had ordered that all members of the ruling family consolidate their *paigahs* (holdings). When H.E.H. and his relatives completed their reshuffling deal, it was the turn of the jagirdars and zemindars to exchange lands and buy up villages wherever necessary so they too would be more effectively able to pool their police forces and meet the growing rebelliousness of the peasantry.

This explained something I had witnessed only that morning, which had moved me deeply. I happened to be coming out of the Prime Minister’s office when I met a group of desperate peasants intent on getting in to present a petition. They had been forestalled for several weeks and had had to scrape up several bribes, their spokesman told me, before they were able to learn even where the office was where their complaints could be filed.

These peasants came from a village which had been evicted *en masse* when a new zemindar bought the land. For several centuries their families had inhabited it, farming on a sharecropping basis and paying an additional small rent for the use of tiny individual plots to raise their own food. The first act of the new zemindar had been to treble the rent, and when the peasants could not pay, he dispossessed the entire village. The mass eviction was timed when the crops which these peasants had planted and tended stood ripe in the fields, and the zemindar claimed the entire



harvest. 'We were mercilessly beaten,' the peasants told me in a chorus. 'Our wives and children were beaten. We have taken all our babies to another village.' The measure which the zemindar used to accomplish the eviction with a minimum of fuss was a simple one, and heartbreakingly effective. He had policed off the well used by the cattle. With their farm animals faced with certain death from thirst if they tried to stay, the peasants had taken their cattle to the village which was sheltering their babies.

In an Indian state—where visitors are smothered with pleasant entertainment and their activities, though not exactly censored, are discreetly channelled—it is not easy to learn the next chapter of a story like this one. But in its broader outlines, the next chapter was already being written, and even my host the zemindar had glimpsed the opening paragraphs.

'Take my case with my five hundred villages,' he said. 'The people are beginning to crave land, because this is a modern age. And now with a free India, I shall have to give some of these people land.'

He bent forward with a little difficulty because of his great girth and kicked off his slippers, settling back again with his little bare feet planted comfortably on the cool tile floor. 'Then, you know, people will begin to ask for an education. When they get educated they ask for improvements, and improvements mean trouble for us.

'People with some education, you know, they will want their rights. When you give the people their rights, then your position will not be the same as it is now.'

'What rights?'

'They will want to be in the village committees—in the town committees! Already there is a demand for it. That is what they are clamouring for now.'

He took a deep swallow of the Emperor's jasmine brew and the star sapphires on his fingers gleamed. 'When you give the people the rights. . . .' He set down his glass and made a fresh start. 'If the government is given into the hands of the people, then you don't enjoy the same prerogatives as before.' He shook his head, less in sadness than as though he recognized the sombre march of



progress. 'When the people get some education, then it will not be the same position any longer.'

This stated the situation so well that I could almost believe that the words came not from the zemindar but from the mouths of the serfs in all of his five hundred villages.



## Chapter XIII

### THE PRINCES AND THEIR PEOPLE

THE rising tide of democracy sweeping through India with independence and threatening to wash away the ancient bulwarks of feudalism worried the zemindar of Hyderabad, but it concerned his ruler, the Nizam, even more. The Nizam had more to lose.

The Nizam was the largest landlord in India. His holdings included one-fifteenth of the territory of the states of Hyderabad and Berar, an area comparable in size to Italy, extending over more than one hundred thousand square miles. He pocketed 15 per cent of the total state revenue of Hyderabad, in addition to extra grants from the Public Exchequer for himself and his two sons which ran into millions. As the greatest Indian prince, he boasts an extra title in his name. Other princes are referred to as H.H.—His Highness; the Nizam is H.E.H.—His Exalted Highness. But since he is a much-married old fellow, hosts of Indians refer to him as H.E.H., His Exhausted Highness.

The Nizam is the Croesus of India. He has more jewels than can be catalogued, more pearls than can be counted, more gold than his vaults will hold. The current legend when I visited Hyderabad was that the two lorries full of bullion he had ordered in 1914 still stood half buried in his palace courtyard because there was no room for the gold slabs inside. People were still talking about the time when his gem experts, some years back, decided the pearls which had remained in permanent darkness for generations needed an airing. They were spread out under an appropriate guard on the palace roof, on roofs of adjoining buildings, on the housetops of all the relatives of the ruling family, until finally the effort to air *all* the pearls had to be abandoned.

However, other Indian princes owned equally great gem collections, and similarly untold wealth. And all these Indian princes equalled the Nizam in another respect—in the amount of absolute power they held over their people. Each ruled under a feudal



totalitarianism which gave them all but the personal power of life and death over their subjects, and some of them appropriated that privilege also. The greater of them included in their claims to power their direct descent from the Sun or the Moon.

At the time of the departure of the British, there was a surprisingly large number of princes—over five hundred maharajahs, rajahs, and nawabs, with their domains ranging from enormous Hyderabad to the size of a large farm. Properly speaking, a rajah or maharajah is Hindu, and these are in the majority. But there is a fair sprinkling of Muslim princes; these are known as nawabs, and the Nizam is the greatest nawab.

With the birth of the twin nations, the princes were left free to accede to the dominion of their choice, provided there was a contiguous boundary. Many states bordered both dominions, and in that case the ruler generally made the choice on the basis of religion—his own religion, of course, not that of his subjects. Many states formed enormous mergers and new groupings, with rule by a committee of the princes involved, and, under the powerful pressure of Patel, have for the most part acceded to India.

There has been so much official rejoicing over the 'bloodless revolution' which is bringing about 'democratization in the states' that it is easy to lose sight of the extent to which the princes retain their ancient privileges. Their time-honoured immunity in respect to civil or criminal proceedings is guaranteed to remain unchanged: no inquiry may be made by their subjects or by any court in the state 'in respect to anything done or omitted to be done' by the prince or under his authority.

Probably the most spectacular among the princes was the late Maharajah of Alwar, whose excesses were so scandalous as to earn him the rare and dubious honour of being deposed by the British. From a photographer friend, I heard a typical story about this old rascal, although, he informed me, 'most of the stories about the old Maharajah are unrepeatable—quite unrepeatable'. (I had received some inkling of this already from someone less reticent, a friend of mine, named Sunil, but who still expressed it as politely as he could by saying his late Highness had been 'interested in everything from little boys to elephants'.) Sunil, however, chose a 'repeatable' story—the mysterious death of a young maharani.



As a boy Sunil had spent his summer vacations in Alwar with his two uncles. One was State Geologist and the other was State Electrical Engineer—‘an example of state nepotism’, said Sunil. ‘One man goes in and gets the Maharajah’s favour, and gets the whole family in—not that my uncles weren’t qualified for their jobs, but that’s the way it goes!’ One summer when Sunil arrived from school the uncles were working on a new palace for the newest Maharani. ‘It was a very small and very pretty palace on the top of a hill,’ said Sunil. ‘My electrician uncle was kept busy designing coloured flood-lighting for the palace fountains, and my geologist uncle had his hands full finding coloured stones for decorations.’

The young Maharani spent comparatively little time in this gem of a palace before she threw herself or was thrown out of it. Many people suggested openly that H.H. might have added murder to his other notorious activities; the official version was suicide.

‘But whichever it was,’ said Sunil, ‘he could no longer stand the sight of the palace and he blew it up. But there stood the empty hill right at the end of the main street of the town; people talked until he could no longer stand the sight of the hill either, and he blew the hill up. All through my summer holiday they were putting in huge chunks of dynamite. Every night from my uncles’ house we could hear it, great explosions as they blew pieces of that hill away. By the time I went back to school they had actually razed the hill to the ground.’

When Sunil returned again to visit his uncles he found the site of the demolished hill a hive of activity. A new palace had been ordered. ‘It was a huge shining thing, walls of stone, a very modern palace with lots of electrical devices.’ It was just the type of palace to keep both uncles very busy indeed. The geologist received a directive to pave the rooms with native stone from Alwar, each floor to be a different colour. ‘He had been working to develop coal mines,’ said Sunil. ‘He dropped all that to hunt for coloured stones. Month after month he was searching and sorting—same type—same colour. This was his whole-time job at that time, matching the stones for the palace floors.’

As for the other uncle, hydro-electric projects had to wait while



light switches were installed and lamp shades ordered. 'The usual electrical fittings would not do for a maharajah's palace,' explained Sunil. 'The Maharajah was ordering enormous quantities of fittings to make sure there would be enough. My uncle was buying up whole stocks. He was touring shops in India and sending to America to have things made to the Maharajah's specifications, getting them by the dozen, by the hundred, to make certain of having plenty of everything.'

'We were small boys then and used to roam around the palace while things were being constructed. The bathrooms were dazzling. There was an enormous bath-tub with various arrangements for making ripples and foam.' Sunil's expressive voice, always brimming with emotion, brought back the small boy's eagerness as he told of this. 'I sat in it. Press one switch and a ripple started, just as in a river. You could get sprays from below—press switches—jets come from all sides and tickle you. It almost bewilders you. You press a switch and you hardly know what will happen. All this is the State Electrical Engineer's job.'

When the electrified bath-tub and the gardens stuffed with peacocks were all ready, the Maharajah prepared to leave his old palace for the new one. 'But before a Hindu may move into a new house,' explained Sunil, 'he must have a religious ceremony called *grihapravesha*, which means literally "house-entry".' The ceremonial rites were conducted by the state priests. Some sacrifices were offered. His Highness said his prayers.

Then with appropriate pomp the Maharajah started toward the front door. His foot touched the threshold. But just as he passed under the door jamb a bit of ornamental plaster fell off and hit him on the head. Not hard enough to hurt his princely head. But enough of a tap so that this very orthodox man recognized it as a bad omen.

The bath-tub which was sat in so joyously by the youngsters never 'bewildered' the Maharajah. The water jets that live so fresh in the memory of Sunil never tickled His Highness's lean wet frame. The fancy light switches never clicked to his nervous fingers. The doors were sealed. The Maharajah never lived in his new palace.



The young Maharajah of Alwar, who mounted the gaddi after his spectacular father had been deposed, had quite a different approach to life. He never forgot that the princes are considered the trustees for their people. No one could have professed to endorse the trusteeship principle more thoroughly than this serious, deeply religious young man. In contrast to the tabloid quality of the old Maharajah's personal life, so little was heard of the young prince's private affairs that he earned the reputation of being a religious recluse.

Now and then he interrupted his studies of ancient Hindu scriptures to issue some public statement or receive some small delegation. I happened to be visiting Alwar State shortly after the occasion when the local leaders of the Praja Mandal, the State People's Party, were granted an audience. The purpose of their meeting was to remind His Highness of the reforms which had been promised, yet never seemed to materialize. The Maharajah's reply could go down as a classic pronouncement on princely trusteeship. His Highness said: 'We are the descendants of the Sun God. The people are our children. The relationship is that of father and son. There is no mention of reforms in the Holy Book. Between father and son the question of reforms does not arise.'

I had the opportunity to learn some of the results of this father-and-son relationship by talking with college students who had been beaten up—some had had their fingers knocked entirely off in a lathee charge; some were put in jail—for venturing to march in a school procession down the main street of the town carrying banners which read 'VACATE THE CHAIRS'.

'Vacate the chairs' is the Indian way of saying, 'Kick out the irresponsible ministers and let us elect our own representatives in government.' In holding this procession, the youngsters had defied the famed Article 144, which banned processions, meetings, or gatherings of more than five persons.

A number of younger school children had joined in this procession, and for the smaller children the trustee's trusted henchmen had a unique treatment. They loaded them into two military lorries and a guard of forty armed soldiers took them out to the forest and dumped them.



Alwar has very special forests indeed. The state leads as a playground for tiger hunting, and it has almost the only wild lions in India. The children showed considerable heroism when the lorries stopped in the jungle and the soldiers ordered them down at the point of guns. I heard about it later from one of the lorry drivers. There were fifty-two children and they began shouting, 'We are not afraid of your guns.' Only a jar of water was to be left with one of the taller boys. I saw the youngster later, twelve-year-old Jayati Prasad, his childish full lips and soft doe-like eyes in contrast to a grave maturity beyond his years. 'We offered ourselves for voluntary arrest,' said Jayati. 'We will not take your water.' A bit rash perhaps, but typically Indian in its defiant renunciation; these children had grown up in families where parents too had defied armed police in their demands for a 'people's Raj'.

Later in the day the driver of the military lorry managed to slip a message to another lorry driver who took word back to the town, and the aroused townspeople went out and rescued the children.

In the light of episodes like this it is not hard to see why the Praja Mandal, the State People's Party, was growing in strength throughout princely India. Oppressed people of all occupations and all religions were swelling the ranks with demands for a responsible government. During the long fight for India's freedom Nehru gave active leadership to the State People's movement. Nehru's echo of Lincoln's words sounded through the land: 'India cannot exist half slave and half free.'

Alwar, though a small state, was seething with clamour for change and with deeds of resistance in which Hindus and Muslims together ran the risks which people must face when working against such odds for democracy. Other states, ranging from big Kashmir to tiny Bharatpur, had an aroused peasant, handicraftsman, and shopkeeper class, who had endured more than enough of rule by the descendants of the gods.

But the divine right of princes dies hard. Such extraordinary privileges and power were not to be abandoned without a struggle. The maharajahs and nawabs knew only too well that with the beginning of self-rule, their princely pre-



rogatives would be swiftly drowned in the rising surge toward democracy.

Then fate came to their aid, in the boom of the religious wars. The Alwar People's movement, so virile and full of hope on Independence Day, had its back broken within six months. It is hardly possible for citizens to get together in unity and press for their civil rights when they live under perpetual fear that the most savage religious bloodshed may break out around the next street corner. And as the Praja Mandal grew weaker, the militantly orthodox Rashtriya Sevak Sangh grew stronger.

The youthful fanatics of the R.S.S. had a sponsorship never enjoyed by the State People's Party. Some of their open meetings and undoubtedly many secret conferences were actually convened in the Maharajah's palace. The convenient Article 144, or the equally notorious Public Safety Act, might be invoked against a group working for democracy but would hardly be imposed on an organization endeavouring to revive the ancient glories of Hindu supremacy under a deeply religious Hindu maharajah.

The next step was to plant the conviction that the Muslims, not the Maharajah and his corrupt ministers, were at the root of all the people's poverty and hardships. Then history could be left to take its course—which it did, in some states, with fanatic savagery.

Some princely states were surprisingly free of religious bloodshed. But all too often there has been the ugly suspicion that, where it favoured certain interests, the religious rioting that broke out in a state left untouched hardly a citizen whose religion did not match that of the ruling maharajah. This principle operated with equal efficiency for members of either majority religion. In Bahawalpur, under a Muslim nawab, the Hindus were driven out with such ferocity that Gandhi sent a delegation of his followers to strive for tolerance. In the Sikh states along the Pakistan border the elimination of Muslims reached epic proportions. In some of these states the 'religious minority' were not, properly speaking, a minority at all. In Patiala, the largest Sikh state, Muslims numbered nearly half the population. In Kapurthala, 65 per cent of the citizenry was Muslim.



In disposing of the 'religious problem' Kapurthala took the record for finesse, handling the situation with the unfailing courtesy for which this most polished of maharajahs is famous. Kapurthala at seventy-five is outstanding among Indian princes for his cosmopolitan elegance: his wives have been selected for their pulchritude from many nations; they have been Spanish, Circassian, Georgian, French, as well as Indian—usually one of each—although his preference in all other matters of culture lies with France. His courtiers must first of all be linguists, so that only French will fall upon his refined ear. He keeps his diaries in French. His palace is a life-sized imitation of Versailles. It was to be expected that he would meet the emergencies of the times with complete good manners.

To the nearly two-thirds of his subjects who followed Islam he regretfully announced that, because of unsettled conditions, he could no longer guarantee their safety. But not for a minute did he forget that the prince is the trustee for his people. His own state troops would give them safe conduct to the borders of the state. This his soldiers did, and once the refugees were across the state line they were fallen upon by gangs of ruffians—including some of their recent escorts—robbed, beaten, and some of them killed. Trusteeship evidently stopped at state boundary lines. With the farm strips of the exiled two-thirds of the population to divide among his new subjects, he found it easy to establish a grateful and loyal peasantry that is unlikely for some time to raise irritating requests for a responsible government.

The senseless hodge-podge of states under individual autocratic rulers threatened the unity of the new Union of India, and it was in the midst of this confusion that Patel made a stupendous drive to absorb the smaller states into neighbouring provinces or merge them with adjacent states, in which the rulers were to form a presidium and act in rotation as the Chairman, or Raj Pramukh, of the merger. He collected the princely signatures on 'Instruments of Accession' in which the rulers ceded to India their powers in the departments of Defence, Communications, and Foreign Affairs. There were dramatic scenes in which whole flocks of princes were summoned: in his function as State's Minister, Patel gave them five minutes to sign on the dotted line. In his function



as Minister of Information, he appropriately publicized their 'patriotism and voluntary sacrifices'.

To the opponents of princely rule, it was unfortunately typical that when the East Punjab States were finally manœuvred into a merger, Patiala—who had rid his state of its 48 per cent of Muslims in record time, and whom many feared as a coming strong man of India—was made Raj Pramukh of the new Sikh Union. He was not merely given the job in rotation—the usual policy in mergers—but in recognition of his great 'voluntary sacrifice' was made Raj Pramukh for life. He was granted a pension running into millions, which—like all the big princely incomes—is free from income tax. There was wide approval of promises that under the Raj Pramukh governments would be modernized, streamlined, made more efficient, but some citizens dreaded the possibility that the increased efficiency of combined police forces would not be for the suppression of crime, but for the suppression of civil liberties.

The movement to swallow up the little princelings in mergers brought down the number of Indian states from the original 562 to a couple of dozen. Many people, while applauding Patel's statesmanship in manœuvring the princes into the Indian Union, wondered whether some of his public pronouncements indicated a reluctance to let democracy go too far. Newspaper appeals urged the people to 'desist from any agitation for responsible government, as this would only render more difficult the task of securing peaceful transfer of power to the people'. The citizens of the princely states were informed of the 'immensity of their obligation' to guard the 'prestige and position of the rulers'. In one speech Patel declared that the rulers had acquired 'by heredity and history certain claims on the people which the latter must honour'; in another he issued a stirring call to 'let no bitterness or rancour spoil the beauty of the dawn which is now opening before you.'

But despite the Sardar's glowing words, some hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of peasants in the princely domain of Hyderabad were not waiting for the 'beauty of the dawn'. After generations of watching the sun rise over fields they tilled but could never hope to possess, freedom to them had but one meaning: the chance to own the soil they worked.



While the Ministry of States was drawing up covenants with the princes, guaranteeing the inviolability of their vast estates, and while measures for compensating the zemindars were being drafted, revised, debated and postponed, the peasants of the fertile eastern part of Hyderabad—the Telegu-speaking area—took matters into their own hands and seized the land. The movement spread through a chain of villages. The conservative estimate was five hundred; others said as many as twenty-five hundred villages. But the true number was unknown, for hardly a word of the Telengana movement found its way into the newspapers, which are under Patel's Ministry of Information, or into the communiqués issued by Patel's Ministry of States.

The appropriated land was largely absentee-owned, but copiously policed by the armed 'goondas' of the great zemindars and by the terrorist Razakars, the Muslim fanatics who worked for the Nizam. Razakars made raids on villages, burning peasant huts, carrying off grain, cattle, and often the peasants' wives and daughters. The peasants fought back. There was considerable violence and bloodshed on both sides; so the Nizam sent his military and his Arab mercenaries to help the Razakars quell the 'disorders', but the revolt continued to spread.

In an area estimated at from five to ten thousand square miles, a simple peasant government was set up. Village committees were elected and collectives organized to form grain pools, distribute seed, and allot land. Fields which had been lying untilled—a frequent occurrence on the vast absentee-owned estates of India—were distributed to landless labourers. The smaller landlords were allowed to retain holdings of between fifty-five and one hundred acres, depending on whether these were 'wet lands' or dry; all land above the limit was given to the peasants. Zemindars who had sent their private police to terrorize the peasants had their entire estates confiscated. The village committees ordered all old debts 'cancelled' and a 6 per cent annual interest rate replaced the baniya's elastic and exorbitant rates.

The movement admittedly was largely, but not entirely, Communist. Some of the participants were Socialists; some of the leadership came from the local State People's Congress, the organization whose first national president had been Nehru and which



had worked in so many of the princely states for a people's government. While the authorities lamented the Communist colouration, public sympathy was with the Indian peasants everywhere, who lived in such abysmal poverty and degradation. The tendency was to view this demonstration as an indication of the urgency of land reform, rather than as a political uprising.

When the Nizam, who had dreamed of ruling his large State of Hyderabad as an independent king, capitulated to the Indian Army, the government of India, whose own land reform measures had lagged, found itself prodded into action. Even though a prompt drive was started against Hyderabad's Communists, and some two thousand of them were arrested, the government found it highly impractical to return the land to the landlords. As one government spokesman expressed it to me, 'It is very difficult to see how the government can make the peasants return the land to the landlords.'

One result of the peasant revolt was to speed up the preparing of electoral rolls in Hyderabad on the basis of adult franchise, for the election of an Assembly which would frame a constitution and deal with reforms. This would undoubtedly meet some delays, particularly since the Nizam had received the assurance that 'all important decisions would be taken with his approval.' But meanwhile the government took the spectacular step of inducing His Exalted Highness to transfer his 7000-square-mile private estate to the State of Hyderabad. Also, the vast lands of his nobles will gradually pass into state control; the peasants who have worked these lands will be protected against eviction, and will eventually have the state as their landlord, rather than a zemindar. Following this precedent, other princes are being required to submit exact lists of their holdings—hitherto a closely guarded secret. The Indian government's expressed intention is to appropriate similarly over-vast estates for the use of the state.

However, neither the Nizam nor his nobles, nor presumably any subsequent evicted princes, must do without compensation. In addition to a three-quarters of a million pound lump-sum payment, the Nizam keeps his palaces, his gold, his more than a



billion dollars' worth of jewels, his bank balances. And his annual tax-free privy purse of £370,000 has been doubled.

Despite the Nizam's lessened power, many of his subjects were still far from enthusiastic. Having struggled for so long against the whole princely system, many of them added that keeping a prince on a pension—of even as little as three-quarters of a million pounds—was an unwanted luxury.



## Chapter XIV

### DEMOCRACY IN THE HIMALAYAS

HIGH on India's jagged northern border and crowned by the eternal snows of the Himalayas is the State of Kashmir. Here such great strides have been taken toward democracy that it can serve as a beacon for the rest of India.

Doubtless the monumental ruggedness of the country has left its mark on the sturdy Kashmiris and bears close relation to the fortitude with which they have struggled for people's rights. In the last lap of their long fight they were helped toward the achieving of democracy by their own Maharajah. He helped by running away.

This took place at the very beginning of the invasion of Kashmir, in October of 1947, when hordes of fanatical Muslim tribesmen were pouring in from Pakistan, killing, looting, and burning villages. A startling sweep, which took the whole Kashmiri Valley by surprise, carried the raiders to the outskirts of Srinagar, the capital. Without a gesture toward protecting his capital or his people, the Maharajah fled from his palace at four in the morning with all his relatives and all his jewels. He deserted with a convoy of forty-eight military lorries carrying the palace carpets, the jade and marble mantelpieces that had been ripped from the fire-places, the precious ornaments from the necks of the goddesses in the state temple, and took refuge far from the fight in his summer palace of Jammu. Most serious of all, His Highness took with him the entire state supply of petrol.

The people were incensed at losing their military transport and petrol, but overjoyed that their prince, from whom they had suffered and against whom they had struggled for so long, had removed himself from the scene. Within forty-eight hours the People's Party—or National Conference, as it is also known—had set up a new People's Government, which administered food stores, organized a people's militia for defence against the invader, and started working on a new constitution. This swift sequence



of events occurred only ten weeks after India's Independence Day. Torn by war and terrorized by fanatical invaders, Kashmir was the first spot on the newly freed Indian subcontinent to get its own constitutional plan down in black and white. Members of the People's Party had studied constitutions from all over the world. Their plan grants voting rights to all adult citizens—men and women—and guarantees equality of minorities and freedom of religious worship.

The remarkable alertness and efficiency of the infant People's Government is a tribute to the cohesion people with a purpose can achieve in the face of punishment and imprisonment, operating for the most part underground, and beset by almost superhuman hardships. The democratic quality of their achievement stems in part from the very depth of the oppression which they united to overcome, and is in large part a result of clear vision of their State People's leader, Sheikh Mohammed Abdulla. The Sheikh is a legendary figure and is the first popular prime minister to emerge after the coming of Indian independence.

Sheikh Abdullah happened to be away from the capital on my arrival in Kashmir, and later, when I met him, it was hard to realize that this good-natured, weather-beaten, eminently practical, and rather homely young man was the object of the mystical legends I had heard about him in Kashmir.

Just before Christmas of 1947 I flew over the wild mountain barrier, with guerrilla warfare going on fiercely but invisibly among the ravines and chasms below, and landed in the enchanted city of Srinagar. Everyone who has ever visited Kashmir knows it has a special magic. 'It is a different world altogether,' my friend Bedi, who was my guide in Kashmir, expressed it; 'the water and the land combine into one.' From the banks of any one of Kashmir's reedy lakes, the mountain ranges—with their crystal hulks reflected far below and their icy peaks standing high above with no visible connection with the earth—seem to stir and grow until eyes and mind and heart are filled with a majestic confusion of water, mist, and sky.

Kashmir loses track of even its own boundary lines in the wildness of the snow-filled Himalayas on its upper frontier. To the north, precisely where Kashmir stops and where the Chinese



province of Sinkiang begins has never been defined. Off to the north-east, Kashmir fades imperceptibly into Tibet, and on the north-west, the frontier province of Gilgit nudges its way into Soviet Russia. In Gilgit there is a spot called the 'Roof of the World'; and to a small sect of Muslims the Golgotha of the Bible is the Gilgit of Kashmir. According to their interpretation of a verse in the Koran, Jesus did not die on the cross, but was spirited away by his disciples and lifted by God 'to a high place—to the Roof of the World'. For this cult Christ is buried in Kashmir.

Kashmir, with all its overtones of legend and magic, its folklore and its wild, incomparable beauty, was the property of Maharajah Hari Singh less by divine right than by right of purchase. One century ago, his great-grandfather, Rajah of the neighbouring state of Jammu, paid the British the modest sum of a quarter of a million dollars—plus the usual military solidarity—for possession of Kashmir. This left the present Maharajah heir to the four million people of both states, Jammu and Kashmir, with Gilgit, Poonch, and a few other feudatories thrown in. A Hindu himself, Hari Singh was ruler over a population roughly four-fifths Muslim and one-fifth Hindu.

The Kashmiri Hindu is a very special kind; a veritable Brahmin of Brahmins. The Kashmiri Pandits are the cream of the Brahmins. The most eminent of all Kashmiri Pandits is Pandit Nehru. Although the Nehru family left Kashmir generations ago, Jawaharlal Nehru felt a special interest in the Kashmiri people's plight under feudalism and served as the president of the State People's movement throughout all of India. Inside Kashmir and Jammu, the drive for self-rule was headed by the Muslim Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah.

The Sheikh had just been graduated from college with a Master of Science degree in chemistry when he started this work. He had studied at Aligarh, where there was a great spirit of awakening among the students, and where, as he expressed it, 'this new life came to me'. When he returned from the more liberal university atmosphere to the cloud of dread at home, Sheikh Abdullah immediately began to speak out openly against the people's injustices.

High above Srinagar, perched on Hari Parbat, is the 'Fortress



of the Mount of God', and into this forbidding stronghold Sheikh Abdullah was flung in 1931 'as the darkest political and most dangerous man,' explained Bedi. This arrest was only one of the eight prison terms he served, but for some reason it has been singled out for its touch of the miraculous. The people were certain he would be shot. They went on a city-wide strike; all shops were closed. For eighteen days business was at a standstill, and then Abdullah was set free.

'He was released because of the people's pressure on the Maharajah,' says Bedi, but Oxford-educated Bedi is more practical and free from mysticism than most of his fellows. Where Bedi gives full credit to the people, the people place the credit at the feet of God.

According to the people's story, on the eighteenth day the Maharajah himself went to the fort, ordered a big fire, and asked that some oil be boiled on it. When the oil was boiling he sent for Sheikh Abdullah and told the guards to lift him bodily and throw him into the fire. The Sheikh himself came forward and said, 'There is no need for force. I myself will go to the fire.' So he went and lifted up the oil in his hands, 'as you would lift up curds or cool cream,' the townspeople told me. He spread it all about and the guards rushed back. He was released because, as the people expressed it, 'the Maharajah saw this spiritual thing.'

His boldness in standing up to the Maharajah, as no one else had dared do, confirmed to the people that he was a man of God. From then on, whenever he travelled through the villages, men, women, and children would crowd around him, each trying to pluck a hair from his head for a memento. He was given a new name, the Lion of Kashmir, and the more imaginative peasants began finding this name of 'Sher-i-Kashmir' written on the leaves of trees. My visit to Kashmir was seventeen years after this event, 'but I myself saw those leaves', a woodsman who had joined the People's Army told me. 'When I was young, many people were bringing those leaves. So many leaves I saw where the worms had made that engraving.'

Sher-i-Kashmir had been appointed to fly to America to represent India's case in the Kashmir issue before the United Nations. My first meeting with Sheikh Abdullah came just before he



boarded the aeroplane for the United States. The thing that impressed me most when I met him face to face was his buoyant personality, combined with a completely unassuming manner. His face has a plain and pleasant ruggedness, his eyes and eyebrows are enormous, and he has the protruding jaw of a fighter. Taller than the average Indian, he strides along in his knee-length white embroidered coat with a swift, firm tread.

Sheikh Abdullah was the son of a Muslim shawl maker, and his own family, although in modest circumstances, was not poverty-stricken. He saw a great deal of the needleworkers who laboured for sub-human wages through their short sickly lives on the delicate handwork which has made Kashmir shawls famous. At any moment their regular work could be interrupted for the slave labour to which their ruler was entitled by divine right.

Muslims had found it easy to blame all poverty on the 'Hindu yoke,' the oppression of the Hindu Dogras, the class to which the Maharajah belonged. While still a youngster, Abdullah told me he had witnessed an incident that led him to learn that the mere fact of Hindus' oppressing Muslims was insufficient to explain poverty. He was passing through an apple orchard which happened to be owned by a Muslim, and which employed some Hindu pickers. The owner had ordered one of the men to the top of a rather frail tree, and when a branch loaded with fruit came crashing down, bringing the apple picker with it and breaking his rib, the proprietor fell on the fellow with curses for his stupidity and heavy blows from his walking stick.

Abdullah accompanied the workman home and was struck by the fact that, apart from the little cluster of plaster Hindu gods and sacred stones and flower petals in a clean corner of the hut, this Hindu family lived in the same wretched squalor as the Muslim needleworkers. Then he began visiting the shacks of quarry labourers—stone cutting is generally a low-caste Hindu occupation—and here too he found that when it came to living conditions the problems of Hindus and Muslims were identical. The fault lay in a system where a fortunate few could treat millions as chattel. As he grew older he became convinced that justice could come only with self-rule and that the people must forget religious differences and wage the fight together.



More incidents about Abdullah came out when I met with Maulana Mohammed Saeed, the General Secretary for the National Conference, a man with gentle glowing eyes and a deeply thoughtful face. He placed particular stress on the value of Sheikh Abdullah's scientific education—an unexpected observation from a maulana. 'Sheikh Saheb could quote from the Koran and put it scientifically so the people would understand,' he told me.

A group of men from the volunteer Home Guard dropped in to the Maulana's tiny office to warm themselves and added their comments on Abdullah to the conversation. There wasn't room for all of them around the miniature hearth, and each man hugged his *kangri*—that charming and sometimes rather perilous little straw basket filled with hot coals which every Kashmiri carries bulging under his garments in winter—as they told me of their great pride in their Sher-i-Kashmir. The episode which has most deeply influenced them took place just after Sheikh Abdullah had come back from college. There was a religious clash in the streets of Srinagar; not a full-scale riot, but enough throwing of stones and threats of violence so that no Hindu dared cross a Muslim district. This placed the Hindus pitifully at a disadvantage, because Hindus are outnumbered nine to one by Muslims in Srinagar.

Srinagar, the 'City of Seven Bridges', is channelled with waterways and busy with the traffic of little pointed boats pushed with poles. Near the Second Bridge a Hindu girl was lying dead in her house. It is an injunction of Hinduism that the body must be offered up on the funeral pyre within twenty-four hours after death, but for two days she had been lying there and the family dared not carry her away for fear of Muslims. When Sheikh Abdullah learned of the girl's death he went to the house and brought away the body in a boat.

'Not even the police or government officials could have done it,' a Home Guardsman who had been a policeman explained to me. 'I was on duty on the Fourth Bridge. I saw the boat passing down the river. Sheikh Saheb was fresh from college then, and dressed in his black student's jacket and red fez. On a wooden plank was the body of the Hindu girl, wrapped in white. Crowds were following the boat's course along the riverbank, shouting



that the Sheikh was a *kavog*—the Kashmiri word for low-caste burner of corpses.

Sheikh Abdullah could hardly have chosen a more symbolic demonstration of his belief that human relations should transcend differences of creed. One of the sharpest contrasts between Hindu and Muslim ritual is in the treatment of the dead: Muslims bury, Hindus burn their dead.

Shortly after this, Sheikh Abdullah began to campaign openly for the people's rights and against the crushing taxes. He spoke of a new programme, of elected representatives, of free speech, of a constitution in which democratic rights would be set down in black and white, 'so they cannot just be rubbed out', the Maulana explained to me. 'Under the leadership of Sheikh Saheb,' he continued, 'I saw Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims move together, and I knew it was a ray of hope for the people.'

That Sheikh Abdullah was able to knit together such an articulate and competent People's Party was due in no small part to the calibre of men like the Maulana who worked with him. When their day to govern came, they had already gained a good deal of organizational experience. During the war years, when transportation of foodstuffs was obviously hampered by the priority of British military requirements, leading to such tragedies as the Bengal famine, distribution in Kashmir was handled by People's Food Committees. But the real organizational skill of the People's administration was gained in the hard school of the underground.

Some of these men who led the long underground fight developed a facility in escaping arrest and shifting from one disguise to another that became legendary, particularly one who bears the affectionate nickname of 'Bulbul-i-Kashmir,' the Nightingale of Kashmir. The name is a good one. Ghulam Mohi Uddin has the same bright-eyed alertness, the hint of shrillness in his voice, and the same suggestion of agile motion even in repose which characterizes the perky little Kashmiri nightingale.

During the last and eighth arrest of Sheikh Abdullah, when independence was already on the threshold, the jittery Maharajah's government made a clean sweep of the democratic leaders, except the Nightingale, and threw them in jail. Upon Sheikh Abdullah's arrest, Nehru, who was then still president of the All-India State



People's Conference, flew to Kashmir, hoping to insure personally that Abdullah received a fair trial. It caused a nation-wide sensation when the Maharajah's police barred Pandit Nehru from entering his ancestral homeland in defence of his friend.

Behind bars, Sheikh Abdullah's chief concern was to re-create some kind of organization that would function outside prison walls and keep the aims and plans for democracy alive, until freedom came to India and Kashmir. The Nightingale served as liaison and became an underground hero.

Secretly passing on the Sheikh's directives was a project perfectly suited to the talents of the Nightingale. With the ban on meetings and the vigilance of the police, people dared not be caught talking together, anywhere. The Nightingale on one occasion came to the public square with a big basket of cherries, squatted behind it, and passed out his messages over sales of cherries. On another, when a house he had entered was surrounded by police, he jumped from a second-story window into a grain bin where he hid for five hours, while people gathered by the hundreds in the streets outside, praying that he would escape.

I was being treated to these reminiscences in front of the big fireplace of the Bedis' home. Freda Bedi is a fair-haired English girl whom Bedi had met and married when both were students at Oxford. She had become deeply interested in the welfare of her adopted country, learned the language, and wore the long full pyjama-like dress of Kashmiri women. She had her own jail record—acquired for her participation in the freedom movement—which is the proud badge of every patriotic Indian who has worked for independence.

While Freda tinkered with the samovar the Nightingale chirped contentedly over his cup of tea. 'Such a difference between now and last year.'

'That was the time you were the most chased,' said Freda.

'That was the time you went around in bride's clothes!' The Nightingale turned laughingly to Bedi. 'You should have seen your wife in those days.' Bedi had been doing his time in and out of jail in other parts of India, and his wife, who had been helping with Sheikh Abdullah's underground messenger service, was going about disguised as a Mohammedan.



'People wouldn't put me in an old muddy burka,' said Freda. 'They wanted to dress me in the best they had, and they would go to the bride's chest.' In ballooning garments encrusted with embroidery, and with daintily crocheted inserts just big enough for her eyes to peer through, Freda moved about, relaying directives from the Sheikh, writing up the Nightingale's reports. Her temporary retreat into purdah had been an experience for her. 'It's a strange sensation it gives you,' she said. 'You're behind a wall. You have this queer knowledge that you can observe everybody and no one can see you. It's a peculiar mentality that must develop among Muslim women.'

The Kashmiri women began abandoning their ancient segregation to take up new responsibilities, with many of their men in jail. As Sher-i-Kashmir's messages were smuggled out from the prison, women helped to make mimeographed copies and to circulate his words: 'Either we win our objective or we perish forever. Maharajah Hari Singh has no moral right to rule us, and as for his legal right to do so, we will contest it whenever possible.'

'With the disappearance of British imperialism from India, rule automatically is vested in the people, and it is for the Maharajah of Kashmir to seek a new relationship with the people. He should read this writing on the wall, or fight the people to a finish.'

Independence Day came, bringing with it partition, and the momentous question of accession to India or to Pakistan. From jail, Sheikh Abdullah raised the slogan: 'Responsible government first and accession afterward.'

Abdullah claimed that the fact that Kashmiris were overwhelmingly Muslim did not in itself prove that they should join Pakistan. The people should be able to weigh both sides. Kashmir was bound more closely economically with Pakistan, and the chief highways connected it with Pakistan. But Kashmir and Jammu also bordered India and had close relations with India, since Nehru and others had been actively sympathetic to its aim of responsible government. On no account must religion be the deciding factor. With India and Pakistan torn by religious conflict, the question of accession to one country or the other had the gravest implications for Kashmiris, who had built their plan for self-rule on the unity of all religions.



Independence was one month old: the unsolved questions grew more acute. And Sheikh Abdullah was still in jail.

Then the women of Srinagar took matters into their own hands. They marched to the prison and demanded the release of Sher-i-Kashmir. When they were threatened by the guards they threw themselves flat in the road. Lying on the ground in their flowing garments, they blocked the gates for three days, and in the end the women won. The Lion of Kashmir was set free.

The Sheikh's first act was to call a public meeting, and one hundred thousand Kashmiris crowded into Srinagar to attend. 'In this time of national crisis Kashmir must hold the beacon light,' he told them. 'All around us we see the tragedy of brother killing brother. At this time Kashmir must come forward and raise the banner of Hindu-Muslim unity.'

'In Kashmir we want a people's government. We want a government which will give equal rights and equal opportunities to all men—irrespective of caste or creed. The Kashmir government will not be the government of any one community. It will be a joint government of the Hindus, the Sikhs, and the Muslims.'

His next act was to send emissaries of the All-Jammu and Kashmiri Nations State People's Conference to Pakistan to discuss accession. Jinnah did not bother to see these representatives, and many people have said this was a great mistake. He might have had Kashmir with its three million Muslims if he had been willing to recognize popular rule. But it is not surprising that Mahomed Ali Jinnah should have shuddered at the very idea of a people's 'joint government of the Hindus, the Sikhs, and the Muslims'. The Quaid-i-Azam had no more love for a people's party than had Maharajah Hari Singh.

Still, Pakistan needed Kashmir urgently for reasons of economics and—even more—of prestige. To lose the largest Muslim state would be a bitter blow, when Pakistan had been created to be a refuge for Muslims. Pakistan was convinced that India was brewing a 'deep-laid conspiracy'. If Kashmir, with its long frontier, went over to India, it would increase the dreaded 'encirclement' of Pakistan by the Indian Union.

Up in the wild North-west Frontier Province, where the Khyber Pass pushes off into Afghanistan, Pakistan was having better



success in signing up Muslims. The North-west Frontier Province is the home of the wild Pathan tribesmen. A tribesman is someone who loves his rifle more than his wife, and will never waste a bullet when he can use a knife. Tribesmen have certain firmly fixed habits, such as going off on raids and kidnapping women, but money payments from the British had kept them more or less on 'good behaviour'.

During the days that the loyalty of the tribesmen was being formally transferred to Pakistan, I was travelling on the North-west Frontier and I photographed the picturesque ceremonies in which the fierce chieftains of the Pathans, most of them unable to use a pen, stamped their signet rings at the bottom of the mimeographed 'instruments of accession'.

At the time that these wild Muslim nomads were pressing their rings into ink pads and making the oval blots that pledged them to Pakistan, the Kashmir People's Government was making one more effort to discuss accession terms with Pakistan. Sheikh Abdullah sent a second delegation to talk with the Muslim League High Command. These conversations had barely opened before tribesmen began pouring into Kashmir under the banners of Islam making off with all removable loot—including women—leaving a trail of sacked and burned villages, and fighting their way through the heart of the Valley.

It took the tribesmen only a few days to beat their way to the very gates of Srinagar, and when the Maharajah fled, leaving Sheikh Abdullah in charge of the Emergency Government, an emergency call was sent to India for military aid. The instrument of accession to India was signed by the Maharajah, seconded by Abdullah; and Kashmir was deep in war.

With little but sticks and clubs and their bare hands, the volunteer People's Army held their besieged capital until planes began arriving from India with soldiers and arms for the defence of Kashmir. The Kashmiris, who never in their days of serfdom had been allowed to handle arms, organized training squads which even women joined. The new life, born of desperate emergency, widened the horizons of the people with astonishing speed. Once the tribesmen were pushed back to a reasonable distance from the capital, literacy classes were started for the many members of the



People's Militia who could not read and write; along with rifle practice, there was drill in arithmetic and the alphabet. With the shy Kashmiri women, the use of a rifle made considerable inroads on the use of the burka.

No longer were the peasants mere serfs of wealthy landowners. Villagers began electing their own local officials, men whom they knew and trusted. Planning for land reform commenced. Tillable wasteland, which previously the absentee landowners had never bothered to plough, was allotted to landless labourers and to those farmers whose holding in the past had been too small for economic cultivation. To stimulate a grow-more-food campaign, Sheikh Abdullah journeyed throughout the state addressing peasants and on occasion setting an example by ploughing a tract of land himself. The Sheikh and his cabinet limited their salaries to £75 a month. The Maharajah, though not dethroned, was stripped of most of his former powers, and his privy purse of £3,000 a month was cut to one-tenth its former size.

Yet the mere presence of the Maharajah, detested as he is by the population, is a painful embarrassment to Sheikh Abdullah, who is seeking to win the Muslim vote away from Pakistan and for union with India. It may well be that the Maharajah will be persuaded to abdicate in favour of his son, a favourite method of handling unpopularity of princes. But the very perpetuation of the office of maharajah undermines the prestige of the People's Government and militates against the dream of the democratic society so ardently desired by the Kashmiris.

In their declaration of independence from feudal rule, the architects of the new constitution described their goal: 'To raise ourselves and our children forever from the abyss of oppression and poverty, degradation and superstition, from medieval darkness and ignorance, into the sunlit valleys of plenty ruled by freedom, science, and honest toil—to make this our country a dazzling gem upon the snowy bosom of Asia.'



## Chapter XV

### STRUGGLE FOR KASHMIR

WHILE the People's Government in Kashmir's capital was completing the new constitution with such clauses as 'Freedom of conscience and of worship shall be guaranteed for all citizens,' across the border in Pakistan a thousand-year-old cry was raised: 'Islam is in danger!'

But when the fanatic Muslim tribesmen began streaming into Kashmir, it seemed as though it was Christianity that was in danger. The tribesmen quickly reached Baramula, a picturesque river town that commands the western slopes of Kashmir Valley, and they selected the orchard of St Joseph's Convent for a motor pool. The stories that began leaking out about the violating and shooting of the nuns of the Order of St Francis sounded like old-fashioned atrocity tales.

I was in Pakistan when the invasion was beginning, and I did not find it easy to make my way to the scene of action. Pakistan officials explained on rather contradictory grounds their reluctance to let me cross into Kashmir. On the one hand 'there was nothing to photograph'; on the other 'it was very dangerous for a woman; tribesmen abducted women.'

I managed to get as far as Abbottabad, the last outpost on the Pakistan side of Kashmir, when the nuns who survived the carnage were rescued, and I was successful in meeting them as they escaped over the border at dawn. The Mother Superior had been seriously wounded and was rushed to the hospital. The grave-faced sister from whom I got the details had been in the babies' ward on the convent grounds when the tribesmen began smashing up X-ray equipment, throwing medicine bottles to the ground, ripping the statuettes of saints out of the chapel, and shooting up the place generally. Two patients were killed: an Englishman and his wife who were spending a holiday at the mission were murdered; and two nuns were shot. 'They didn't hurt my babies,' added the sister triumphantly.



For nine days there was a reign of terror in the convent. The nuns, their hospital patients, and a few stray townspeople who had taken refuge at the mission were herded into a single dormitory and kept under rifle guard. On one of these days, after an air attack from the Indian Army had left the tribesmen in a particularly excited and nervous mood, six of the nuns were brought out and lined up to be shot. It was the accident that one of them had a conspicuous gold tooth that saved the sisters. One of the riflemen wanted to get that tooth, before his colleagues had a chance at it. In the scuffle that followed, one of their chiefs arrived; he had enough vision to realize that shooting nuns was not the thing to do, even in an invasion, and the nuns were saved.

It was a strange invasion that made its way into Kashmir. If you went out escorted by local officials, as I often did in those days, while making an extensive photographic survey of Pakistan for a *Life* story, you saw nothing. You would be driven over picturesque but deserted roads to the border of Kashmir and shown a breathtaking vista of mountain scenery which had fine picture post card value but little news value.

But when I could I slipped out unescorted and chose another road, and saw such things as the group of several hundred Pathans I met shouting and yelling along the main highway leading from Pindi to Kashmir. They had erected a cardboard victory arch over the road, decorated it with greenery and flower garlands, and were waving green flags bearing the central star and crescent of the Muslim League. They were waiting for their leader, Badsha Gul, of the Mohmand tribe, who was bringing one thousand men, a convoy of trucks, and ammunition. Unlike higher officials, these tribesmen seemed to know what was going on when I questioned them.

‘Are you going into Kashmir?’ I asked.

‘Why not?’ they said. ‘We are all Muslims. We are going to help our Muslim brothers in Kashmir.’

Sometimes their help to their brother Muslims was accomplished so quickly that the trucks and buses would come back within a day or two bursting with loot, only to return to Kashmir with more tribesmen, to repeat their indiscriminate ‘liberating’—and terrorizing of Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim villager alike.



Where all the buses and lorries came from was something of a mystery. A little research in Pindi threw light on one method of putting tribesmen on wheels. I found that taxi companies were donating twenty or ten or a couple of lorries each, the number I suppose depending on the intensity with which the owner believed the Muslims in Kashmir needed rescuing.

The greatest puzzle was where all the arms came from. Tribesmen manufacture arms. They have small factories dotted through the hills where they make a good facsimile of an English rifle or pistol. I photographed one of the larger of these munitions works, belonging to the Afridi tribe. It was a rock-bound shack where five men worked. Since it took one man a month to make a rifle, it is doubtful whether all the shacks on the North-west Frontier would account for more than a fraction of the equipment with which the tribesmen poured into Kashmir during the autumn of '47. Certainly these miniature ballistic establishments would hardly explain the mortars, other heavy modern weapons, and the two aeroplanes with which the invaders were equipped.

One source was not too hard to find, although witnessing it in operation meant getting up very early in the morning. In Pakistan towns close to the border, arms were handed out before daylight to tribesmen directly from the front steps of the Muslim League headquarters. This was not *quite* the same as though the invaders were being armed directly by the government of Pakistan. Still, Pakistan is a nation with but one political party—the Muslim League.

Sardar Ibrahim, the young lawyer who headed the Azad-Kashmir movement which sprang up at about that time and pushed in with the invaders, had his own explanation of the armament mystery: 'It is faith and faith alone that carries us from victory to victory.' The Azad-Kashmir, or 'Free-Kashmir', movement favoured joining Pakistan.

In happier days, the followers of the Azad-Kashmir movement, or at least the younger and more enlightened of them, might have worked with the People's Party and Sheikh Abdullah. In the Azad-Kashmir movement, which originated in the tiny feudal district of Poonch, were some democratic elements. These people had suffered under the Maharajah Hari Singh just as much as those



citizens who formed the State People's Party in Srinagar. They were just as passionately opposed to princely rule as the followers of Abdullah. But their Islamic bias blotted out all else. To them Sheikh Abdullah, the Muslim who co-operated with Hindus, was a 'traitor'. His appeals for Hindu-Muslim tolerance were labelled 'crocodile tears'.

The formation of the Azad-Kashmir Government was greeted with such wide acclaim in Pakistan that it was difficult to escape the suspicion that it might have been set up as a puppet government. From Pakistan's capital a train loaded with medical supplies and volunteer personnel left every Wednesday morning for the Kashmir frontier. It was not long before some of the Azad-Kashmir soldiers, taken as prisoners of war by the Indian Army during the fighting, were found to have paybooks of the Pakistan Army in their pockets.

Pandit Nehru, in repeated protests from India, claimed that Pakistan was aiding and abetting the invasion, that the use of soldiers and officers from the Pakistan military, even though out of uniform, constituted an act of aggression. When Gandhi seconded Nehru, and sanctioned the use of Indian troops in Kashmir as necessary for defence of the helpless population against the invaders, the Pakistan press screamed that the Mahatma had abandoned his mantle of non-violence. Gandhi, they said, 'relished violence when it suited his taste, and was no friend of Muslims.'

That many Kashmiri Muslims had no wish to be liberated by Pakistan was evident to me a little later when I managed to reach the war-torn areas of the Valley. My friend Bedi took me to Baramula shortly after its recapture from the tribesmen. The once lovely town, straddling the Jhelum River at the gateway to the Valley, was as heaped with rubble and blackened with fire as those battered jewels of Italian towns through which many of us moved during the war in Italy.

In Baramula the townspeople told me of a young Muslim shopkeeper who had sacrificed his life rather than recant in his creed of religious tolerance. His martyrdom had taken place almost under the shadow of the convent walls, and in the memory of the devoted Kashmiris he was fast assuming the stature of a saint.

Mir Maqbool Sherwani had been a co-worker of Sheikh Abdullah



in the democratic movement, and like Abdullah he had preached the need for religious unity in the fight for people's rights.

He must have been a sort of Robin Hood character, from the stories the townspeople told me, championing peasants who could not pay their exorbitant taxes, pitching into the police when he found them beating up some luckless victim, bolstering up the resistance of the people against their many oppressions.

When the tribesmen invaded Kashmir and terrorized the countryside, Sherwani, who know every footpath in the Valley, began working behind the lines, keeping up the morale of the besieged villagers, urging them to resist and to stick together regardless of whether they were Hindu, Sikh, or Muslim, assuring them that help from the Indian Army and People's Militia was on the way. Three times by skilfully planted rumours he decoyed bands of tribesmen and got them surrounded and captured by Indian infantry. But the fourth time he was captured himself.

The tribesmen took Sherwani to the stoop of a little apple shop in the town square of Baramula, and the terrified townspeople were driven into the square in front of him with the butts of rifles. Knowing Sherwani's popularity with the people, his captors ordered him to make a public announcement that joining Pakistan was the best solution for Muslims. When he refused, he was lashed to the porch posts with ropes, his arms spread out in the shape of a cross, and he was told he must shout, '*Pakistan zindabad: Sher-i-Kashmir murdabad.*'

It was a curious thing that the tribesmen did next. I don't know why these savage nomads should have thought of such a thing, unless their sight of the sacred figures in St Joseph's Chapel on the hill just above had suggested it to them. They drove nails through the palms of Sherwani's hands. On his forehead they pressed a jagged piece of tin and wrote on it: 'The punishment of a traitor is death.'

Once more Sherwani cried out, 'Victory to Hindu-Muslim unity', and fourteen tribesmen shot bullets into his body.

The next day Baramula was recaptured and the townspeople reverently cut down his body. They took me to the place where they had buried him, in the rubble-strewn compound of the mosque. Sherwani's father and brothers came and brought Mir



Maqbool's picture to show me. Even the soft-focus effect of the fuzzy studio portrait could not erase the intensity of the eyes and the look of strength in the high forehead. Already the people, in the affectionate manner of Kashmiris, were calling their beloved hero by a new name. Mir Maqbool Sherwani had become 'Mujahid Sherwani'. Mujahid means more than martyr. The spirit of his name is 'Sherwani the Fighter in a Righteous Cause.'

We left the mosque and Bedi and I walked up the hill to the deserted convent. It was badly defaced and littered, and a delegation of students from Srinagar was coming next day to clean it up and salvage what remained of the library. The group had been carefully selected to include Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, and would be escorted by members of the Kashmiri Home Guard, both men and women—these too chosen symbolically from the three religions. They would put the Christian mission in as good order as they could in time for Christmas Day.

We made our way into the ravaged chapel, wading through the mass of torn hymn books and broken sacred statuary. The altar was deep in rubble. Bedi stooped down over it and picked up one fragment, turning it over carefully in his big hands. It was the broken head of Jesus, with just one eye remaining.

'How beautiful it is,' said Bedi, 'this single eye of Christ looking out so calmly on the world. We shall preserve it always in Kashmir as a permanent reminder of the unity between Indians of all religions which we are trying to achieve.'



## Chapter XVI

### ‘WHAT SHOULD INDIA DO?’

I FLEW down from the snowy slopes of Kashmir and returned to the capital at Delhi with a deepened understanding of the new life that freedom could bring to India. What I had observed in the rarefied sun-filled air of the Himalayas was the result of more than independence from foreign rule. I had seen the first vigorous flowering of a people emancipated from feudalism.

The example set by the People's Government effectively disproved the thesis that the Indian people were too backward, shackled with religious prejudice, and unfit for democracy ever to govern themselves. The ragged men I had seen tramping bare-foot through the snow to attend literacy classes, the election of village and district councils by the peasants themselves, the positive steps toward human equality—all these were tokens of the richer life which could come to India when she realized her full freedom.

Kashmir, however, had some setbacks ahead. The split between Pakistan and India eventually means partition for Kashmir, with the section I had just visited remaining in the Indian Union, but other portions going to Pakistan.

Nevertheless, this popular government had made great strides toward democracy. The most impressive achievement was the forthright tackling of India's most formidable problem: the repressive system of land tenure. They had begun a movement to give the peasant a chance to own the soil he tills and to abolish absentee ownership—reforms often promised but repeatedly postponed in many parts of India.

This general hesitancy on land reform was puzzling. The government party had been outspoken in its opposition to landlords and princes in the days when the Congress Party was urging the British to ‘quit India’. Abolition of the zemindari had been the most important plank in Congress election manifestos. In the spring of 1946, during my first week in India, I attended a Press



conference at which Pandit Nehru declared: ‘There will be no room for the zemindari system in an independent India.’ Nehru’s stand on the princes had been demonstrated by his service as president of the All-India State People’s Party, which stood for a democratic people’s government to replace that of the ‘autocratic princes’, as they were called in those days.

But now a new set of terms to describe princes was coming into vogue. Their ‘self-sacrifice’ and ‘remarkable patriotism’ were extolled in the Press. Under such headlines as ‘Dawn of a New Era’ and ‘Rulers’ Sacrifice’, tribute was paid to their ‘voluntary transfer of power to the people.’

It took careful reading of a good deal of fine print to realize that after this ‘voluntary transfer of power’ the prince of a state, or the Executive Raj Pramukh of a group of merged states, retained a surprisingly strong hand in some vital matters: he still kept the historic princely immunity from trial or even inquiry into ‘anything done or omitted to be done’ by the ruler; the *combined* armed forces of the princely mergers remained under control of the Raj Pramukh. Some smaller princelings, tottering in the face of rising agitation for democratic rule, had been rescued only by their ‘voluntary sacrifice’ in joining the mergers of small states.

Whether these newly discovered attributes of princes bore any relation to the fact that Sardar Patel, the Minister of States, was also Minister of Public Information was not discussed in most newspapers. However, the fact that Patel was also Minister of Home Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister was much discussed; more than a few people suggested that the Deputy was growing stronger than his chief, Prime Minister Nehru, and that Patel’s influence was holding back reforms.

During nearly thirty years of the Congress Party’s independence campaign these two men had worked together. Nehru had expressed liberal, often socialist, ideas; Patel had been the friend of big business and the great maharajahs. Their mutual devotion to Gandhi had welded them together. They had been jailed together repeatedly during the Quit India movement. Now that independence had been achieved, the Patel pattern seemed to be dominant in internal affairs, although Nehru was undisputed chief



in the international sphere. One theory of the Patel-Nehru relationship was that the differences between the two might not be so wide as they seemed, or they could not have worked so long together; another, that through working together they had actually grown together in a kind of partnership where each man needed the contrasting qualities of the other to supplement his own leadership.

Eager to speak with Patel, I arranged for an appointment and was directed to come to his home at five in the morning. This would have surprised me if my experience at Gandhi's ashram had not taught me to take dawn appointments with Indian leaders as a matter of course. When I reached the Sardar's home I was surprised to find it dark; only one small window was lighted. But as I walked up on to the round-pillared portico I suddenly realized that the porch was filled with people, sitting silently in the darkness, watching the brilliantly moonlit lawn just beyond.

Suddenly a white figure, hooded and barelegged, darted out into the moonlight and strode rapidly down the drive. A smaller white figure appeared, chasing along behind, and together the two flew out through the gateway. Patel and his inseparable daughter Maniben had started their morning walk. At the sight, the people on the porch poured off like ducks streaming into a pond and bobbing along after the leader. Following them, I had a chance to observe the smooth relay with which visitors were passed to the Sardar for a moment's conversation, and then shunted on by his daughter.

As the procession turned into near-by Lodi Park, Maniben led me ahead to walk with her. She was something of a mystery woman, this devoted, grave, and rather plain daughter, often seen with her father and seldom heard from, and I was glad of the opportunity to get better acquainted. She began telling me how she did 'all the odd jobs' for her father, 'like driving other people off'. 'On the morning walks, as many as twenty to four hundred people may come. I dispose them off, one after another. It gives them the satisfaction of meeting him.'

As we followed the curving path through the black shadows of densely massed trees, she talked about her father. 'Since 1931 I have never left him. I am with him twenty-four hours a day.' She



arose a little earlier than her father and did her daily spinning before the morning walk. ‘I make all my father’s dhotis and all my saris. For years he has not bought any clothing outside. All that he wears I have made with my own hands,’ she said with affectionate pride.

The spinning had begun with her first introduction to Gandhi, when she was a shy young girl. An aunt had dragged her into the room when Gandhiji was visiting her father. She recalled how Gandhi had asked her to promise not to wear foreign cloth, but only handspun khaddar.

‘Did you promise?’

‘I said I would do whatever my father told me to.’

On Maniben, as on so many young girls, Gandhi had made a deep impression. The life of service into which she had been drawn by Gandhiji had something to do, she believed, with the fact that she had never married, although she hastened to tell me that she was very happy and content with her position.

Our path emerged abruptly into the open moonlight; I could see how preoccupied her face had grown and how tensely knit her eyebrows were under the white hood of her sari. ‘I think,’ she mused, ‘my father gave me too much freedom.’

‘He never told me what to wear or what to study or who my friends should be. He never told me to non-co-operate. I did that myself. He never even told me to go to prison . . . to be with him!’ Her answer was one that only an Indian girl could have given.

After a while Maniben, as though expressing thoughts that had been greatly occupying her mind, began speaking of the Indian princes. Her simple, earnest words seemed almost a caricature of her father’s press releases. ‘Now the princes have got their freedom. Before that they were just shut away in their palaces, and could only go to the races or a cinema. When they came to see us they had to do it surreptitiously, always looking over their shoulders to see if the secret police were following.’

It was interesting to learn that this cordiality between the Sardar and the princes went back to the days of the Quit India movement, when Nehru was busily urging that people’s rule replace that of the maharajahs.

By now we had walked the complete circuit of the park and



were approaching the road. The street, so deserted when we commenced our walk, was full of parked cars and people began jumping out of them and running up to speak with the Sardar. Maniben was busy once more 'disposing them off' to her father. Just when I began wondering if I was going to be disposed off, too, father and daughter came back and carried me off between them to their home for breakfast.

Only after I had stuffed myself with dates, toast spread with marmalade, apples, oranges, and some wonderful little cakes made of chopped pistachios did it occur to me that I was eating a completely vegetarian breakfast, without even an egg. Patel's Hinduism was something I always tended to forget; it seemed so natural to think of him only as the politician, the 'Jim Farley' of India, which he has been called. Patel was a Brahman, more the Hindu in his food and dress than Nehru, and yet more the practical politician, the master organizer. While Nehru with his stirring words and liberal ideas captured the imagination of the people, Patel methodically built up a structure which was almost a personal political party, with men sympathetic to his views in the Cabinet and in the provincial legislatures. Now he was extending his process into the princely states. This, I believed, helped to make clear how—in the face of overwhelming popular sentiment—it had been possible to retain in the states so much of the framework of the old feudal order under the new 'popular' dress.

I began my interview with a question about the present relationship between India and Great Britain. 'I would not like to break away from the British at all,' said the Sardar. (I recalled that before independence any leader who had suggested remaining on dominion status would have been politically doomed.) 'In spite of our struggle, our relations with Britain are very cordial to-day. Since the struggle was based on non-violence, there is no bitterness. Nehru remained in jail twelve years, almost the same period that I did. But Nehru and I are friendly to Britain to-day.'

'And America?' I asked. 'What does India want from America?'

'America can help with engineering experts and capital loans. We will want to raise large sums of money, and we don't see any escape except to ask America to help us.' The word 'escape' was



hardly surprising, for I knew how much India dreaded political domination after her long experience as a colony. Much as India needed foreign capital for industrialization, she was wary of the foreign domination that might follow the capital. Patel summed it up: ‘There is scope for outside help if the control is largely Indian.’

Some Indian capitalists, I had heard, had been deeply worried lest the new independent India turn toward Socialism. Nehru had often talked of the importance of planning industry and limiting profits, but some business-men, I had observed, seemed confident that no drastic moves would be made. I remembered Birla’s statement to me: ‘Nationalization is just a slogan.’ And Patel, although he said, ‘Nationalization has been a resolution in the Congress for many years,’ indicated that for the immediate future India would operate with a mixed economy.

Most existing industries, textiles among them, would be left to private enterprise, but nationalization of banks, insurance, shipping, and coal mines was a ‘possibility’. Power, Patel believed, should be built up on a planned basis. Most of all the nation needed steel—the Tata works, big as they were, supplied barely one-fourth of India’s needs—and he described the government plan to erect huge steel plants in a number of provinces. ‘Rapid industrialization is essential for India,’ Patel emphasized.

There was no doubt that Patel realized that industrialization was of the utmost importance to the country. It was also apparent that he felt he had to pay more attention to starting the wheels of industry turning than to the status of the individual worker.

Labour, he told me, would give a good account of itself ‘if disciplined’ instead of ‘listening to the voice of leaders who lead them to industrial unrest’. This remark took on added implications for me after I had left India. In February, 1949, Patel introduced a bill that would have outlawed all strikes in a wide group of essential services, with provisions for fining and imprisoning strikers. The measure aroused the opposition of all shades of organized labour: the small though energetic Communist unions, the somewhat larger but indecisive Socialists, even the enormous, government-sponsored INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress). It was finally withdrawn in a speech delivered by



Nehru, and prepared by Patel and the Home Ministry, but its threat must remain vividly in the minds of Indian workers. In many speeches Patel had complained that 'no one stood to gain by strikes; they only retarded production' and implied that if the workers would be patient and trust the government leaders their needs would be taken care of in due course.

The same reasoning, it seemed to me, lay behind the agreements with the princely states. Making the nation strong was the Sardar's first consideration. Bringing about a quick, peaceful accession to India by the princes took precedence over the yearning for democratic rule by the peoples of the states.

With anxiety over the spread of Communism in Asia so prominent in the minds of Western leaders, it is pertinent to ask how far the government can compromise with the feudal princes over the land question, and with industrialists over collective bargaining, without strengthening the Socialists and the Communists. Though both groups are relatively young and still weak, they are powerful in the growing labour unions and in the various movements in the princely states. In outbreaks such as the Telengana uprisings and peasant seizure of the farmlands in eastern Hyderabad, there are unmistakable signs that the Communistic voice is reaching the potentially rebellious poor peasantry and threatening Congress Party control of rural India. Government suppression of the party is an even better indication of its increased potency.

In Bengal and Hyderabad, as in several other states and provinces of India, the Communist Party has been declared illegal. But in most parts of India, the Communist Party is still technically legal, although many of its members have been arrested or have gone underground. Communist newspapers are still published in Bombay and a few other cities, although now and then the police smash the presses and put the reporters and sometimes the editors in jail as *détenus*—not accused, exactly, but persons confined 'in the interests of public safety'.

Some Indians, themselves anti-Communist, vividly remember that those very Congress leaders who were clapped into jail time and again by the British were handed the reins of power when the British withdrew. They wonder whether a pattern is being repeated. The political arrests have not been confined to the Com-



munists: Socialists also, though in lesser numbers, have been put into prison. Many middle-of-the-road citizens are pointing out that arrest of critics is no solution to the problems facing India, and the growing unwillingness of government leaders to tolerate open debate and the expression of dissenting opinions is causing much uneasiness.

There appears no possibility of an immediate Communist rise to power. They constitute a very small though inevitably well-knit and disciplined party with a membership of about eighty thousand, a tiny drop in the vast ocean of India's four hundred million population. They are almost all young men, between twenty and forty. Some are the well-educated sons of families of moderate means; a surprising number are Brahmans, the high-caste traditional teachers of India. These men have left comparative security to go out into the field to organize peasants and workers; more than any other political party they have cut across religious and caste lines and embrace Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs; their chief source of strength has been their record of intense practical field work. But the Communists cannot be considered as a major force in India to-day.

Whether the small and harassed Communist Party makes substantial gains will depend not only on its members but on the performance of the two leading parties—chiefly the Congress, but also the increasingly strong Socialists. In China the Kuomintang rode into power on pledges of reform and then alienated the peasant, who was won over by the Communists—who actually seized and redistributed land. Similarly, agrarian reform is the key to the political future of India. For the peasants there is only one problem. They will follow those leaders who offer a solution to the land problem.

The Socialists, although constantly at odds with the Communists, are also advocates of drastic land reform. As their general secretary, Jayaprakash Narayan, expressed it to me, they believe that agrarian reform can be carried out ‘through the adult franchise and legislation and not through coercion, as Russia did or as the Communists in India would do.’ No one should hold more than twenty acres, Jayaprakash told me: ‘This is enough for any man to live on in real comfort.’ The smaller landlord who must



part with some of his land to provide twenty acres for others should receive compensation—but not the great zemindars.

Jayaprakash Narayan at forty-five is vigorous, gaining in popularity, and believed by many to be one of the coming leaders of India. Educated in four American universities, he spent seven years in America, worked in Chicago iron foundries, in a terracotta factory, and in the Armour meat-packing company.

For many years the Socialist Party was part of the Congress; only recently did it break away, carrying with it a large portion of its left-wing membership. I asked Jayaprakash the reasons for the break, pointing out that the Congress Party, and Patel as well as Nehru, advocate certain types of nationalization.

‘Patel believes in patching up the old garment of our economy,’ said Jayaprakash. ‘We believe in making a completely new garment. As for Nehru, great a man as he is, he hesitates. He is waiting for the Congress to make up its mind. Government economic policy is hardly shaped by Nehru; Patel does the real shaping.’

The Socialists were distressed at Nehru’s indication of growing conservatism and his willingness to water down the plans for socialization of industry and agriculture he had advocated for so many years. Yet most people readily forgive the inconsistencies, recognizing the vastness of the new nation’s problems: the vast lack of trained personnel to handle nationalized industries, the massive heritage of illiteracy, and the vestiges of the outworn feudalism which saddle the nation. The overwhelming sincerity of Nehru impresses everyone. Gandhi voiced the opinions of millions when he said, ‘Jawaharlal is as pure as the crystal. The country is safe in his hands.’

With India entering the world stage, Indians were saying, ‘Panditji is the greatest man in Asia.’ Nehru’s stand that the Western world should ‘stop treating Asia like a poor relation’ won the hearts of his people. They realized with pride that their Prime Minister commanded the overwhelming respect of both the Eastern and Western worlds. His European education and many years abroad, combined with an intimate knowledge of his own country, fitted him for a unique international role. His closest friends had their affectionate jokes about what Nehru himself



called his ‘queer mixture of East and West’. Maulana Azad, the great Urdu scholar, once said, ‘When Jawaharlal talks in his sleep he speaks in English.’

That Nehru can make himself understood to Europeans in terms of their own past and traditions was demonstrated at the remarkable conference at New Delhi, where, for the very first time, the Asian and Occidental powers of the Pacific swept aside such barriers as race and colour and combined to rebuke a European power. New Zealand and Australia—no less than the Indonesians they defended against the Dutch—realize that their interests are identified with the future of an independent Asia. And no one knows better than Panditji that India’s emancipation has brought colonialism—in Africa as well as in Asia—to its twilight period.

That conference at New Delhi made it unmistakably clear that Nehru will go down in history as a great man, regardless of the political vagaries of the moment. He has become the spokesman for a liberated Asia. Gandhi had wide appeal, but it was primarily as a religious, ethical figure. Nehru is the symbol of the overthrow of European domination of Asia. He represents a maturing Asia, growing out of feudalism and entering into modern industrial civilization, learning to dispense with European masters and teachers.

Visiting Nehru one evening, I asked about his ideas on ‘India as a bridge between the East and the West.’ He corrected my phraseology, saying, ‘India could form a bridge between her own past and the modern world. That is to say, everything that is good in the modern world. But we don’t intend to be swept off our feet by the West.’

‘What particularly in the Western world appeals to you?’ I asked.

‘The Western concept of individual liberty, for one thing. The modern problem is how to insure individual liberty and yet maintain central direction, which has become necessary in modern society. But central direction requires some limitation of human liberty. The whole background of Indian thought in the past has been the recognition of the value of individual liberty.’

‘India’s roots are very deep. It is very difficult to talk about



India. In one of my books I referred to India as a palimpsest—so many layers of writings—multitudes of ideas and urges and desires, all mixed up, virtues and vices—as it often is in old countries. But one point that stands out is the essential vitality of India. And vitality normally makes good.’ He paused for a moment and then added, ‘In some cases it goes bad, as in Germany.’

Nehru’s anti-fascist ideas were well known. During the Spanish Civil War he had visited Republican headquarters in Barcelona, when the city was under bombardment, and once while passing through Rome he had refused an invitation to visit Mussolini. He told Mussolini’s messengers that he had nothing in common with their dictator.

‘What do you think of the clash between the United States and the U.S.S.R.?’ I asked. ‘Where does India fit in?’

‘That is a very delicate question,’ Nehru said. ‘Every country thinks in terms of its own policy. If it is too weak to follow any policy of its own, it falls into line with some other country. We have no intention of being dragooned into line with some other country. One thing is clear; any country which attempts any aggression against India will be resisted. But we are not in the direct line of the U.S. and U.S.S.R. conflict.’

Turning to the subject of government control of basic industries: ‘The foundations for industry’ rather than the superstructure, Nehru said, ‘can most effectively be built under national auspices. A man investigating private capital won’t care to take the risks of exploiting virgin fields. The state thinks of the next generation and of the whole basic development of the country. In the next seven or eight years, power resources will be so greatly increased in quantity that we shall have electric power in almost every village in India.’

I brought up the subject of land reform. ‘Abolish landlordism,’ declared Pandit Nehru, ‘and from that all other advances flow. The Indian peasant is conservative. He doesn’t take kindly to co-operatives and the like. We cannot resort to compulsion in our democratic form of government, so large co-operative projects must be started by the state in the hope that this example will be followed. And as we bring new land under cultivation it will be very easy for the government to organize co-operatives.’



It was growing late, but before leaving I decided to ask bluntly about his differences with Patel.

‘The important point is—do the differences outweigh the agreements?’ Nehru answered enigmatically.

Pressing him further, I asked if he would resign in the event of an open break, or would he expect Patel to resign?

Pandit Nehru was silent for several moments, and the reply he finally gave might have been an evasion, an answer, or an indication that the future would be influenced by forces far beyond either himself or Patel. ‘India is in a very dynamic phase,’ he said. ‘A changing phase. Its vitality is wrong at times. That is why it is so difficult to forecast the future.’

As I was planning to leave India within a few days, I said a final good-bye, and Panditji gave me a book to carry with me. While he was inscribing it to me I mentioned that on my return to America I would be lecturing. I spoke of how difficult it is becoming to answer the questions one gets from the audience, how impossible in this shifting world to give even an approach to the constantly repeated question: ‘What shall we do?’

Nehru looked up from his book. ‘That is the difference,’ he said, ‘between the Indian and the Western mind. The Indian would not ask what he should do, but what he should *be*.’

He bent over the flyleaf once more, signed his name and the date, and handed me the book. ‘For centuries,’ he concluded, ‘we have been asking ourselves this question: “What should we be?” I think that now in the new free India the time has come to ask ourselves the new question: “What should we do?” ’



## Chapter XVII

### INTERVIEW WITH GANDHI

I HAVE never been an autograph hunter, and the reverence with which some people regard a collection of assorted scrawls is an emotion I do not share. But with Mahatma Gandhi it was different. I wanted Gandhi's autograph and I wanted it on those two pictures I had earlier gone through so much grief to take: the shot at the spinning wheel where my camera broke down, and the dawn walk which had cost me so much sleep.

My stay in India was almost at an end when I brought these two photographs to Gandhi and asked him to autograph them.

'It will cost you five rupees each,' he said.

In astonished silence I opened my purse, took out a ten-rupee note, and tucked it under his spinning wheel, while he signed 'M. K. Gandhi' in his spidery hand, inscribing his signature both in Hindi and English, and adding the date: January 29, 1948.

He glanced up at me and asked, 'Do you know what is for the ten rupees?' Gandhi spoke beautiful English with a richly varied vocabulary, but with quaint little transpositions all his own.

I was able to guess. 'For the harijan fund.'

'Do you know what is a harijan?'

Yes, I knew, I told him. 'But if I had said I didn't know?'

'To know what is a harijan I would ask you to go and see them—not in a fashionable street like Kingsway, but in the bustees where they live in filth.'

Referring to the employers of those other harijans I had seen in the lime pits of South India, I asked him what would correct a situation where the owners of the tanneries made riches while the untouchables who worked for them wasted their health and lives away in conditions of misery.

'If the people who so degrade themselves,' said Gandhi of the tannery owners, 'will behave toward these harijans as they will behave toward themselves—and do unto others. . . .' His unfinished sentence was such a Gandhian blend of the Golden Rule



and trusteeship that it brought back in a rush the questions that had been troubling me all these months, and I knew I must have the answers before I went back to America.

'To-morrow will be my last day in India,' I said to Gandhi, and explained that I was writing a book on India and wanted to have a talk with him before I went home.

'How long have you been working on this book?'

'It's almost two years now.'

'Two years is too long for an American to work on a book,' said Gandhiji, laughing.

Then he spoke seriously. 'Once before an American lady interviewed me for a book. You know of Miss Mayo?'

Indeed I knew! Her ghost had persecuted me everywhere. Her *Mother India*, stuffed with half-truths and second-hand information, had aroused such resentment that its reputation dogged me even in remote villages where no one could read. The fact that I was automatically associated with the memory of my countrywoman Katherine Mayo was the only disadvantage I suffered in India through being a woman. Once in a primitive region a tribe of aboriginals surrounded me, voicing the hope that I would not write a book like Miss Mayo's.

'She had a right to quote me, but not to misquote me,' said the Mahatma, and he asked me most earnestly if he could count on me to report his words accurately. I assured him he could, and showed him my notebook filled with hasty, home-made abbreviations, and explained to him that wherever I quoted what a person said it was as photographic as I could make it, that I would use his words in my book just as he spoke them.

'You promise?'

'I promise.'

The next day on my way to Birla House I thought there could be no more stimulating experience for my last day in India than this opportunity to interview Mahatma Gandhi. He had been regaining his strength rather slowly since his recent fast, and I had not been certain until the last moment whether he would be considered strong enough for an interview. Actually, this was my second 'last day' in India. Two and a half weeks earlier I had booked aeroplane passage for America, and just the night before



I was due to leave, Gandhiji had announced the undertaking of his fast. I decided immediately that this was no time to leave India, and postponed my departure.

When I arrived in the garden behind Birla House and saw Gandhiji sitting there on his cot in the sun, so wiry, and so vital, despite the recent hardships of fasting, my first question suggested itself. I waited while he prepared the charkha in front of him for spinning, laid a piece of blue paper by his side to keep the cotton fuzz off the bed, stretched some strands of white cotton on the blue paper in neat parallel rows, and put a big straw hat on his head. Gandhi tilted it at a gay angle to keep the sun out of his eyes, and tied it quaintly under his chin. Then I asked my first question.

It seemed a rather silly one at the time. It doesn't seem so silly now. 'Gandhiji,' I said, 'you have always stated you would live to be one hundred and twenty-five years old. What gives you that hope?'

His answer was startling. 'I have lost that hope.'

I asked him why.

'Because of the terrible happenings in the world. I do not want to live in darkness and madness. I cannot continue....' He paused and I waited.

Thoughtfully he picked up a strand of cotton, gave it a twist, and ran it into the spinning wheel. 'But if my services are needed,' he went on, 'rather I should say, if I am commanded, then I shall live to be one hundred and twenty-five years old.'

The wheel began to turn now, and the strong-knuckled hands started moving with rhythmic precision. I plunged into the subject of trusteeship, which I believed could have such wide implications in a newly freed and pliable India, and asked him what he considered a good trustee.

'A good trustee is one who discharges his trusteeship faithfully to the letter and in spirit.'

'Who among Indian industrialists is functioning along those lines?'

'No one that I know.'

'How long will it be before someone begins living up to your ideal of trusteeship?'



‘Who knows the future?’

This was not enough. Too many people had been waiting overlong for the benefits of this random benevolence. I wanted to protest that it is too easy to hide behind the skirts of such a beautiful ideal unless its meaning is clearly defined.

‘Suppose someone among those people who are closest to you said, “I want to be a trustee”,’ I asked. ‘What would you tell him to do?’

‘Then of course you don’t need to go any farther than the owner of the house.’ It was coming now—the point on which I had wanted enlightenment for so long. ‘He is trying to be a trustee. He is not the only one. Many are trying, in the sense I have suggested. I fondly hope they don’t deceive me.’ Suddenly the spinning wheel stopped. Gandhi sat there in silence.

Then very slowly, almost as though he were opening a long-closed door and peering in, he said, ‘If I found out Birla deceives me I would not be here under his roof. I am here because I believe what he says. I have known him for a very long period’—he counted up the years, thirty-two—‘and I have not found him guilty of deceiving me.’

He seemed disturbed to have pinned all this comment on Mr Birla. ‘It is not just the specific person, it is the idea of a trustee,’ I told him. ‘How do you think it should be carried out? Suppose the industrialist makes a profit of half a million rupees a year and the workers make twenty-four rupees a month?’

‘A trustee does not make a single farthing for himself,’ stated Gandhi. ‘A trustee is always entitled to his commission. He will take his commission subject to those for whom he is a trustee—the consent of his guardians—no, I do not mean guardians’—once more he sought for the right word—‘“wards” is the word. If the wards say he must not take more than five rupees a month, he must do this, or hand over the trust.’

‘Have you told Mr Birla this? Have you talked it over?’

‘Of course.’ The inner door was closing now. And when he repeated, ‘Of course!’ I knew the door had slammed tight shut.

It would have been easy at some time during those thirty-two years for Gandhi to walk a short way, just a few miles, and see for himself whether the fulfilment of the trust measured up to his



faith in the trustee—or, what was more important, to his faith in the trusteeship principle. That he did not look, or if he looked that he did not correlate what he saw with the principle, was an attitude which one of my Indian friends referred to as ‘the blind eye’. This outlook was not peculiar to Gandhi. It is shared by some other Indian leaders with high ideals, and is far from unknown to the democratic West. It is only that it was more startling to meet it in Gandhi because of the down-to-earth quality of his leadership and because of his love of truth. Despite his seeming inconsistencies, this passion for truth was very real.

The ‘blind eye’ failed to flash that image of conditions in the bustees, where his beloved harijans and other working-men lived in squalor, to his alert brain, there to be translated into vigorous corrective action, because of a deeply rooted and instinctive attitude. It was not merely to protect his friend Birla. It was more than even to protect all the Birlas and Dalmias and maharajahs and owners of wealth. It was to protect the old order: a simple, pre-machine age order whose passing he would not admit.

Gandhi had no ambition to reshape the structure of society. He wanted to reshape the individual human heart. He cared very deeply about calling out the best in every man. If that man was poor it was better for him to remain so, for wealth was riddled with temptation and abundance could lead to indolence and sin. If that man was so rich that he held the destinies of other men in his hands, it was equally important to move his heart. But the inner change of heart, whether in manufacturer or maharajah, must always be by conversion, never by compulsion.

‘If I said to some of these good men’—Gandhi was speaking very earnestly now—‘you *must* hand over everything you have, that would be the touchstone. Then my term of service would be finished.’

‘Finished? Why?’

‘That one man would say, “I did not know at bottom he is a dictator, a Hitler!” ’

I found this difficult to understand. To this saintly and righteous man, making a positive move to enforce the code he had long advocated was ‘dictatorship’; prodding the captains of industry and feudal princes along the road to trusteeship would be synony-



mous with 'Hitlerism'. We seemed to be wandering in a twilight region between the Middle Ages and the twentieth century where the tractor is less honourable than the wooden plough, where goods bearing the taint of the machine possess less inherent virtue than the products of a man's ten fingers, where to accomplish land reform you appealed to the hearts of both landlords and sharecroppers for better understanding. Gandhi had once defined trusteeship as 'a dream which insures the rights alike of prince and pauper'.

This was a never-never land where Gandhi and some of his most devoted followers had failed to meet. Nehru, who was closer to Gandhi than perhaps any other man, has often spoken and written of the variance between Gandhi's ideas and modern conditions, and how Gandhi was 'unable to fit the two'. To Nehru, backward India with its haphazard economy cried for industrial planning under state control, and the underfed millions required a swift and thorough application of scientific agriculture.

As the Mahatma and I sat there talking in the mild winter sunlight, Gandhi spinning and I scribbling down his answers to my questions, I inquired whether he was personally opposed to the use of science and machines in agriculture. He told me positively that he was, because 'the tractor means replacing the labour of man.' As for state-controlled or nationalized industry, this would result in 'a nation of slaves'. When I asked how the poverty and backwardness of the Indian people could be overcome he replied, 'By working with their hands and brains'—through handicrafts, which would make India 'a happier country than any other country in the world, including America.' He laughed up at me as he said this and quipped, 'But that is tall talk.'

'No,' I said, 'that is not tall talk. America is not entirely a happy country these days.' And I turned to the topic which I had most wanted to discuss with Gandhi.

I began speaking of the weight with which our new and terrible atomic knowledge hangs over us, and of our increasing fear of atomic war. Holding in our uncertain hands the key to the ultimate in violence, we might draw some guidance, I hoped, from the apostle of non-violence.

As we began to speak of these things, I became aware of the



change in my attitude toward Gandhi. No longer was this merely an odd little man in a loincloth with his quaint ideas about bullock-cart culture and his vague social palliatives—all of which I so heartily rejected. I felt in the presence of a new and greater Gandhi.

It took me the greater part of two years to respond to the undeniable greatness of this man whom millions of devoted Indians accepted as *bapu*—father. Perhaps it was harder for me, an American, to hurdle his antiquated ideas on the machine age—and I still think them antiquated—because to me the machine has always been a glorious thing. My deepened appreciation of Gandhi's unique value for his country first came when I saw the power and courage with which he led the way in the midst of chaos. In recent months I had lived through one of India's greatest moments, when Gandhi risked his life to stem the destructive fury of religious hatreds, when, as Nehru expressed it, 'in a dissolving world he has been like a rock of purpose and a lighthouse of truth'. On our own side of the globe, our world seemed in danger of dissolving, and I felt this steady voice might have something to say to us.

I asked Gandhi whether he believed America should stop manufacturing the atom bomb. Unhesitatingly he replied, 'Of course, America should stop.'

We went on to talk of this, Gandhi speaking thoughtfully, sometimes haltingly, always with most profound sincerity, I jotting down his words, and neither of us could know that this was to be one of the last—perhaps his very last—message to the world.

Since this momentous day, many people have asked me whether one knew when in Gandhi's presence that there was an extraordinary man. The answer is yes. One knew! And never had I felt it more strongly than on this day, when the inconsistencies that had so troubled me dropped away and Gandhi began to reach forward and probe into that dreadful problem which has overwhelmed all of us. Nehru has said of Gandhi that he was 'obviously not of the world's ordinary coinage; he was minted of a different and rare variety,' and during these last moments of our talk I felt, as Nehru has expressed it, that sometimes 'the unknown stared at us through his eyes.'



I had asked Gandhiji how he would meet the atom bomb. Would he meet it with non-violence?

'Ah, ah!' he said. 'How shall I answer that!' The charkha turned busily in his agile hands for a moment, and then he replied: 'I would meet it by prayerful action.' He emphasized the word 'action', and I asked what form it would take.

'I will not go underground. I will not go into shelters. I will come out in the open and let the pilot see I have not the face of evil against him.'

He turned back to his spinning for a moment before continuing.

'The pilot will not see our faces from his great height, I know. But that longing in our hearts that he will not come to harm would reach up to him and his eyes would be opened. Of those thousands who were done to death in Hiroshima, if they had died with that prayerful action—died openly with that prayer in their hearts—then the war would not have ended so disgracefully as it has. It is a question now whether the victors are really victors or victims'—he was speaking very slowly and his words had become toneless and low—'of our own lust . . . and omission. Because the world is not at peace'—his voice had sunk almost to a whisper—'it is still more dreadful . . .'

My time was up now, and I rose to leave. I folded my hands together in a *namaskar*—the gesture of greeting and farewell which Indians use instead of shaking hands. But Gandhiji held out his hand to me, and shook hands cordially in Western fashion. We said good-bye, and I started off.

Then something made me turn back. Perhaps it was because his manner had been so friendly. I stopped, looked over my shoulder, and said, 'Good-bye—and good luck.'

Only a few hours later this man who believed that even the atom bomb should be met with non-violence was struck down by revolver bullets. And from those who were at his side in that dark moment we know that as he fell his hands were raised in prayer, and the word 'Ram'—meaning 'God'—was on his lips.



## Chapter XVIII

### 'THE GREAT LIGHT IS EXTINGUISHED'

I WAS only a few streets away when the assassin's bullet was fired. Friends ran to find me, and in a few minutes I was back in Albuquerque Road trying to make my way through the gate. Word-of-mouth news travels with lightning swiftness in India, and thousands of people were already pressing toward the scene of the tragedy.

The crush around Birla House was so great I could hardly reach the door, but once I was there the guards recognized me and slipped me through. In the next moment I was inside the room where Gandhi, dead less than an hour, lay on a mattress in the corner on the floor. His head was cradled lovingly in the lap of Brij Krishan, his secretary. The devoted little grand-nieces and grand-daughters-in-law who had always surrounded him in life clustered around now as he lay in his last sleep.

Already his face was changed. It had lost that taut look—glowing brown skin stretched tightly over lean bones—which used to give him, even in sleep, an expression of such extraordinary alertness. I remembered how we had been allowed to receive his darshan while he slept, during the exhausting days of his fast, and the joyful moment when he had broken his fast in this very room. I had stood on this very spot, and watched him smile up from the same mattress, while he blessed the orange slices and people shared in 'God's gift'. Then the people in this room were laughing and crying with joy. Now they were silent and stunned. Few people even wept.

The only sound was the endless chanting of the Gita by the women followers, who sat along the edge of the mattress and swayed to the rhythmic recitation of the 'Song of God'. They were singing the final cantos, always sung at the death of a Hindu; for Gandhi these verses had special appropriateness. The Gita tells how the warrior hero Arjuna, perplexed by the distressing knowledge that brothers and blood relatives fight against one another,



lays down his bow. And Lord Krishna teaches him the virtue of performing the right action and leaving the consequences to God—for everything comes from God and everything returns to God.

The women kneeling along the mattress were chanting the name of God now, singing ‘Ram, Ram’ and beating their hands softly to the rhythm of the prayer. Suddenly into the numbness of that grief-filled room came the incongruous tinkle of broken glass. The glass doors and windows were giving way from the pressure of the crowds outside, straining wildly for one last look at their Mahatma, one last darshan, even in death.

No one had expected that Mahatmaji would die. Even when a home-made bomb had exploded during prayers only ten days earlier, and missed Gandhiji by a scant few yards, few persons realized that this was only a first attempt by fanatic Hindu assassins. Even during the most anxious days of the fast, people whom I questioned about the possibility of his death had said, ‘We cannot even imagine it.’ And now that death had come their sense of personal loss was almost beyond endurance.

I slipped away from the wordless tragedy in that little room and pressed through the sorrowing crowds to the garden path where Gandhiji had met his end. Already a radiance hung over the spot. Someone had marked the place with a candle and its beam was steady and golden in the black Indian night. The place was marked off with a humble little line of sticks, simply laid out in a triangular shape on the ground, and a large and very ordinary-looking tin can had been set down to encircle the precise spot where he fell. Kneeling around it were men and women of all religions—just as Gandhiji would have had it. United in deepest sorrow, they were reverently scooping up into their handkerchiefs small handfuls of the bloodstained earth to carry away and preserve.

Then a new current developed in the crowd, and I was swept along with it to the front of the house, where I found Nehru was speaking. Once more he had climbed up on the gate of Birla House to address the people. Illuminated by a street lamp, he stood there, his face ashen grey and his features drawn with pain and shock. ‘Mahatmaji is gone,’ he was saying, ‘And the great light is extinguished. Darkness of sorrow and distress surrounds us all. I



have no doubt he will continue to guide us from the borders of the Great Beyond. But we shall never be able to get that solace which we got by running up to him for advice in every difficulty.' At this point Jawaharlal Nehru, who of all Indian leaders had probably depended the most on Gandhiji for strength and solace in difficulties, broke down and wept openly, and the mourning thousands wept with him. Then he made a supreme effort to speak his final sentence. 'We can best serve the spirit of Bapu by dedicating ourselves to the ideals for which he lived and the cause for which he died.'

All through that terrible night people gathered in hushed groups in the streets of New and Old Delhi. My friend Bedi, who had recently flown in from Kashmir, walked the streets with me, and translated as we listened to the crowds.

Hours after the tragedy we heard the first mention of the assassin. Of course Nathuram Vinayak Godse, the warped young R.S.S. editor from Poona who had done the deed, had been promptly arrested and locked up, but to those masses of bereaved people it was not merely one misguided individual who had murdered their Bapu, but an impersonal force that had dealt out death. And in this they were very right.

Gandhiji's clear, compelling voice of tolerance—that most powerful single voice in the nation—had to be stilled if the forces of intolerance were to survive. It was no accident that Gandhi was done away with by a fellow Hindu—one of those who stood for all that was worst and most rabid in the religion, just as Gandhi stood for all that was broadest and best in Hinduism.

Gandhiji's assassination was the tragic climax to a long history of carefully nurtured religious antagonisms. The divide-and-rule policy of the alien interests with their powerful motives for preventing Hindus and Muslims from working together. The scramble of Muslim orthodoxy to take advantage of the cleavage. The answering thrust of equally orthodox Hinduism: the creation of its own storm troopers, the R.S.S., with its swastika emblem and its ideals of high-caste Hindu supremacy. It was no accident that the trail of Godse, when it was finally traced, led through those states which had given particular encouragement to this fanatical youth movement, through Gwalior and Alwar. Part of the pattern



also was that the Maharajah of Alwar, who had made such effective use of religious warfare in breaking up the democratic movement in his state, and whose own palace had been a meeting ground for the R.S.S., should be taken into detention for suspected complicity in the murder of Gandhi.

But during these first black hours, nothing had been heard of suspected accomplices and little was known of the assassin himself beyond his high-caste name. When the mourners in the streets started to think of the murderer as an individual, they began to say, ‘The man who has done this outrage—he will die by inches. He will sob for every breath of his life.’

By dawn the lawns and gardens of Birla House and all surrounding houses, Albuquerque Road and all streets leading into it, were flooded with people. By the tens of thousands they swirled through the Birla gates, until they crushed in an indivisible mass against the house. And still they came, beating against the walls of the house in surging waves of mourning humanity. I doubt that there has ever been a scene like it; certainly there has been none in my experience. The house, with its rising terraces, was like a rocky island holding its precious burden high above this sea of grief. Laid out on the roof of a terrace was the figure of Gandhi, tranquil and serene, where all could see and receive his last darshan.

The sun was very bright on his shroud of white homespun. The morning light lent a special radiance to the coarsely woven khaddar which had served as a symbol of freedom during the long battle against foreign rule—when Gandhi ‘discovered the power hidden in the charkha’ and had taught the people to make their own cloth and boycott British goods as part of the non-violent struggle. Standing beside the body on the roof were men and women who had fought by his side for independence. Two of the closest and most devoted, Nehru and Patel, stood near the head of the Mahatma. This was a sad time to remember how, only that week, Patel in his conversation with me had dismissed the youthful fanaticism of the R.S.S. as just ‘a passing phase’.

All the most intimate members of his ashram were there, as far as I could see, except Sushila. Only a few days earlier the woman doctor had left for Pakistan on a peace mission. She had gone to



Bahawalpur, a princely state ruled by a Muslim nawab, where the Hindus were victims of fresh atrocities. This was a dangerous mission for a Hindu woman, but her family had come from this region, and her relatives had suffered during earlier outbreaks there. Her last errand as Gandhiji's emissary had cost her her place at his side when he died, for Sushila had been with Gandhi to care for him even during his jail sentences.

At eleven o'clock the body was carried down and placed on the flower-laden weapons-carrier that waited by the front door. Nehru, Patel, and Baldev Singh, the Defence Minister, performed the final touches on the bier. Following Hindu ceremonial, strips of cloth, one red and many white, were placed over the body. This was to signify that the deceased had lived to the fullness of life, which indeed he had, and that his going was a joyous release, which for him perhaps it was, and that he had left behind both children and grandchildren in abundance. Last of all, the figure was draped with the yellow, white, and green flag of the new free India, and the cortège was ready to start.

Something was happening in the crowd. From where I stood, taking photographs on a cornice of the roof, I could see a path opening up and a woman making her way toward the bier. The woman was Sushila. She had received the news in Pakistan; a plane had been placed at her disposal and she had arrived just in time for this last farewell. She threw herself on the bier and clung sobbing to Gandhi's feet.

Then that greatest of all processions began to move. The crowd moved with it. Winding along a five-mile course, a human stream gathering to itself all the tributaries of the countryside, it grew and grew until it was a mighty river, miles long and a mile wide, draining toward the shore of the sacred River Jumna.

For the first time in many months the Muslims of the city came out in large numbers, to follow with heavy hearts the body of the man who had championed their rights to peace and security as a minority. 'The Muslims in India have lost their father,' people were saying. Not since the spontaneous and short-lived joy of Independence Day, exactly five and a half months earlier, had the Muslims of Delhi mixed with Sikhs and Hindus so fearlessly and openly.



In the great procession came first the surprisingly military pattern of armoured vehicles (the army had been called upon to arrange the funeral procession and had supplied its own touches), then the mounted cavalry of the Governor-General's Bodyguard fluttering a thicket of pointed pennants, next the flashes of red-and-blue uniforms of the Rajputana Rifles and other military units, and finally the flag-draped body on the flower-garlanded weapons carrier. ‘The tears gush to my eyes when I see the prophet of non-violence being drawn in a military carrier,’ I heard someone behind me say. The note of peace was supplied by the host of khaddar-clad marchers who brought up the rear. And then the human flood closed back over the road, over the entire visible landscape, until it seemed as if the broad meadows themselves were rippling away toward the sacred River Jumna.

At the burning ground I made my way to the pile of sandalwood logs where the cremation would take place. Three Hindu priests were pouring pails of ghee (melted butter) on the logs and were adding the red perfumed chips called ‘sandur’. Then an oddly assorted little group came and sat down cross-legged on the ground, as though facing a camp fire. Among them were Lord and Lady Mountbatten, the Chinese Ambassador, Maulana Azad, the Muslim scholar who had been so close to Gandhi, Mrs Naidu, the warm-hearted poet, who in happier days called Gandhiji her ‘Mickey Mouse’, and Raj Kumari, literally bowed down with grief.

Suddenly these watchers had to rise to their feet and cling together to keep from being trampled on. The procession was approaching, the crowds about it surging, uncontrollably, close to the pyre. Although I was within a few feet of the sandalwood logs, my view of Gandhi's body was blocked off by the crush of people desperately eager for one last look before their Mahatma was given over to the flames. Sometimes I could catch sight of Nehru's haggard face as he stood by the edge of the bier, then a glimpse of Patel in his toga-like robe. As the priest started his ceremonial chant, and the first red flame licked up toward the sky, the pressure of the crowd knew no bounds. Adding to the confusion, a corps of mounted police charged on horseback through the maelstrom, trying to beat the people back from the body of Gandhi.



My view of the fire was blotted out by the swinging of lathees and rifle butts.

The flames rose high into the sky now, and the million people seemed to have sunk into a low bowl of darkness. All through the night most of them would continue to watch until the flames burned low, until at dawn Nehru, more lonely-looking than ever, would speak a few sad words over the ashes, saying, 'We have failed to protect our greatest treasure.' And later, with due ceremonies, the ashes would be divided up to be scattered on the sacred waters of the broad rivers of India.

But during the long night of vigil around this immortal fire, I like to believe that a tiny flame was kindling in each of those million hearts; that, just as Bapu had wished it, not from compulsion but from inner conversion, his people would turn their feet toward righteous paths. His supreme sacrifice in the cause of tolerance and unity could mean the turning point for India. He had given his life to light the way.













